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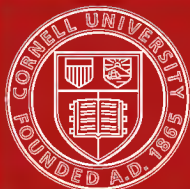


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THE TRAGEDIES OF EURIPIDES.

THE
TRAGEDIES OF EURIPIDES

IN ENGLISH VERSE.

BY

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"The Odyssey of Homer done into English Verse."*

IN THREE VOLUMES

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PREFACE.

"IT is," remarks the author of *The Ancient Classical Drama*, referring to Euripides, "to the disgrace of English scholarship that we have no verse translation of this all-important poet produced in our own day." Though some might peradventure challenge the inference, on the plea that our scholars have been more profitably employed, the fact is indisputable. The comparative neglect of Euripides by translators for more than a century past is, indeed, one of the enigmas of English scholarship. If this were accompanied by a corresponding paucity of editions of his works, or by an increasing tendency to underrate his merits, the marvel would have at least the quality of consistency. But, on the one hand, Euripides has of late years received from commentators his full share of attention, and, on the other, nothing is more certain than that the old fashion of disparaging his genius (in which Schlegel led the way, giving all the weight of his authority to a sentence which others were too uncritical or too timorous to revise), is now utterly discredited, and that we have ceased to regard the generations of Greeks and Romans who loved and revered him, as degenerate fools and blind, and are at last making some humble efforts to understand them and to recover their point of view. In fact, the revived interest in Euripides has taken every form but that of doing for him what has been so freely done for Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, and Sophocles. True, many translators have nibbled at him during the present century. The *Alcestis* has been translated by Banks (1849),

Nevins (1870), Williams (1871), Browning (1871), and H. B. L. (1884); the *Medea* by Lee (1867), Cartwright (1868), Mrs. Webster (1868), and Williams (1871); the *Hippolytus* by Fitzgerald (1867), Williams (1871), Miss Robinson (1881), and H. B. L. (1894); the *Hecuba* by Beesley (1875); the *Ion* by H. B. L. (1889), and Verrall (1890); the *Hercules Furens* by Browning (1875); the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* and the *Iphigeneia in Tauris* by Cartwright (1868); the *Bacchæ* by M. Glouton (1845), Milman (1865), and Rogers (1872). On analysing this list, we find, (1) that only three plays have been translated in verse within the last dozen years; (2) that out of the eighteen tragedies two translators only have attempted so many as three; (3) that half of the plays have remained untouched since the complete verse translations by Wodhull (1782), and Potter (1781-83). These two versions, fairly faithful and in many respects meritorious as they are, are wholly lacking in two features which the present-day reader will hardly consent to forego:—in variety in the choral metres, and in distinction of the lyric portions of the dialogue from the prevailing blank-verse. The measured tread of the iambus or trochee, reappearing in stanzas of the same structure, and in lines of the same average length, through chorus after chorus of eighteen plays, produces an impression of monotony and heaviness which is in striking contrast with the swift and ever-varying movement of the metres of the original; and the quivering passion that thrills through the stormy lyric outbursts, which, like cataract and rapid, so often break the even flow of the *senarii*, is sorely missed when merged in the tranquil stream of blank-verse dialogue. To this metrical monotony may be largely due the fact that the choruses, instead of being, as they doubtless were to an Athenian audience, the most attractive portions of the plays, are to the modern reader of translations often the least attractive, the heaviest reading, and the most certain to share the general fate of

“moral reflections.” It does seem strange that the singers who during the present century have enriched English poetry with wealth of metrical variety lavish beyond all precedent, should have lived in vain for the translator of the Greek drama, especially since those magnificent notes of chorus-music were struck by the author of *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus*, after which the good old Pindaric-ode pattern, with its guilelessly capricious alternations of longs and shorts, seems curiously out of date.

In spite of the examples of Shelley and Swinburne, the employment of rhyme in choral lyrics appears in some quarters to be still regarded as an open question, certain translators going so far as to pronounce the unrhymed structure intrinsically superior. It is perhaps unsafe to dogmatize : *solvitur ambulando*. The form of verse in which a translator finds that he can—not, perform his task most quickly, but—do his best work, the mould into which, for him, the great thoughts of the ancient master most felicitously run, so that his task becomes a labour of love, that is for him the best, and he will not wisely let preconceived theories bar his choice, or the authority of imposing names turn him out of his own path. I incline to think that the translator who, not from his experience in the management of it, but in compliance with a theory, rejects rhyme in lyrical passages, is in danger of making the task of worthily presenting his author more rather than less arduous. He is apt to think that he thereby secures closer correspondence with the original; yet I am not sure that this is not more apparent than real: rhymed and unrhymed choruses by the same hand (as in Plumptre’s and Campbell’s *Sophocles*) differ little, if at all, in fidelity (properly understood) to the original. On the other hand, he who, for the sake of faithfulness, discards rhyme, may find himself drifting into a new danger, that of making a fetish of this faithfulness, the result of which will be to

deprive his work of that air of spontaneity and freedom without which it is not a reproduction, but a caricature. Anything of the nature of bondage to the letter, anything that thrusts on the reader the reflection, "This is a translation; for our writers don't set forth their own thoughts in this style," is so far a departure from a true presentment of an author whose countrymen never found in his diction anything cramped or foreign. And, *per contra*, whatever contributes to produce in the reader the illusion that he has before him an original work, is so far a step in the direction of justice to his author. Now rhyme possesses a great initial advantage, in that rhymeless lyrical measures excite in the English reader a sense of the unusual and the disappointing, as though the writer were niggard of the wealth of his own language, were content to forego half of the magic of sound—that echo-music which charmed the ears of the people when scholars looked askance at it, and which scholars have long since forgotten to call barbarous. But the Greek no more suspected a great dramatist of neglecting any means whereby he might satisfy his hearers' demand, not only for noble thought, but for musical expression, than of begrudging them aught of his treasures of experience and imagination. In both directions he felt that the poet had taxed to the uttermost all the resources of melody, as of thought, at his command; and, without a similar impression, the modern reader will hardly enjoy a similar satisfaction. Moreover, there is in the structural basis of the group of languages to which English belongs something comparatively harsh and unmusical, rendering them far inferior in rhythmical possibilities to Greek; hence, no conceivable perfection of metrical execution could give that satisfaction to the ear which was given by the Greek measures: the instinct, therefore, of northern poets led them long ago to provide a compensating satisfaction in the accessory of rhyme, like the rustic host who

trusts that his wine may recommend his coarser fare to palates accustomed to delicate viands. Hence it becomes a serious question for the conscientious translator, whether, by discarding one element of the charm of English lyrical poetry, he has not imposed upon himself the obligation of filling the void with the inadequate materials left to him, of achieving a consummate excellence of workmanship, the difficulty of which is indicated by the rarity in English literature even of attempts in this direction.

There are three classes of readers whom a translator may have in view—the general reader, for whom the perfect translation is that which does not suggest an original, and whom it is therefore hard to satisfy;—the scholar, to whom the original is a joy, and (when improved by his own emendations) a pride, and whom it is impossible to satisfy;—hear his *lasciate ogni speranza*, “no one has ever translated a Greek chorus, and no one ever will!”¹—and the young student, to whom the original is part of the riddle of the painful earth, and who is thankful for small mercies.

I must confess to having had the last of these most present to my mind in the preparation of this version, perhaps because experience has taught me to sympathize with him, with his difficulties in elucidation, with his despairing contemplation of the outcome of his travail, with his bewildered scepticism as to the merits of the ancients who seem to yield to him so little gold in return for so much quarrying, with his gratitude for whatever brightens his toil and helps him to understand how the men of old found beauty where he finds baldness, and grace where he finds stiffness. I am not sure that my predecessors have consciously laboured to smooth his path: even the prose versions from which he snatches a dubious

1. Prof. Goldwin Smith (*Specimens of Greek Tragedy*, p. xvi.) goes even farther, almost placing the Greek Choruses upon the same footing with “Gratiano’s reasons.”

and furtive joy embarrass his reference to the original by neglecting the obvious device of numbering the lines, of which omission, indeed, most verse translators are also unaccountably guilty. It is in his interest that I have preserved, in the version here presented, a line-for-line correspondence with the original in the blank-verse dialogue, and, for the most part, in the choruses also,¹ which latter will in many cases, I think, be found by the scholar who compares them minutely with the original to be more nearly literal "construes" than perhaps they look.

I have regarded it as a fortunate coincidence that the edition of the plays most extensively used by young students is also that which has on general grounds most commended itself to my judgment. Paley's insight into the spirit of Euripides, his sobriety and "level-headedness" as a commentator, his recognition of the limits of his sphere as an interpreter, have impressed me more and more as I have proceeded with my task. Above all, with his conservatism in regard to the text I am thoroughly in accord; indeed, I am inclined occasionally to go even further than he, in retaining MS. readings where he inclines to admit emendations. In certain instances, of course, a strong presumptive case may be made out against the MS. text on prosodical or philological grounds; and here I am thankful for the guidance of those who are far better equipped specialists than I can ever hope to be. But the most numerous and most serious alterations proposed, nay, adopted with light-hearted confidence, by some recent editors, are not of this nature. They are the offspring of subjective criticism; and a commentator is never on more perilous ground than when he makes his own comprehension or appreciation of a passage the criterion of its

1. The main exceptions are due, not to diffuseness in rendering, but to the employment of lines differing considerably in length from those in the text, e.g., *Ion*, 881-911.

genuineness. In examining these destructive-constructive assaults on the text, it has more than once seemed to me that the impatience of a too-clever scholar has rejected a deep thought instinct with poetic feeling, in favour of an obvious and commonplace sentiment. The heavy-shotted dogmatism of such emendators, the contempt which they pour upon the old reading, might well make the conservative translator feel as if the confession of his faith were an admission of imbecility. Yet no sympathetic reader will tamely suffer his private judgment to be taken by storm, and the more I study Euripides, and try to realize, with respect to each reading thus arraigned and condemned, the mental attitude of the poet and his audience, the less am I satisfied that modern scholarship is doing itself credit by this eagerness to reject MS. readings on purely aesthetic grounds. The point of view of the critic is too often one which (to put it mildly) was not demonstrably that of the Athenian audience, while as for that of the poet—only from a Shakespeare could we feel justified in accepting *ex cathedra* judgments on questions of poetic taste or dramatic instinct in Euripides.

While following in the main Paley as an interpreter, I have to acknowledge very considerable obligations to the editions of the other scholars who have done so much to assist students to appreciate Euripides. When I have ventured to differ from one or other of them, it has been because I believed myself to be supported by very high, or at least respectable, authority.

Notes are no part of a translator's duty: a translation is in itself a commentary, and a translator who claims to have found a clear and relevant meaning for a reading challenged on the score of unintelligibility has thereby furnished, in Conington's phrase, "a piece of embodied criticism," which has at any rate the merit of brevity. I have therefore limited my notes almost exclusively to the defence of readings which

have been condemned on aesthetic grounds by scholars whose censures are of too much weight in the student-world to be passed by in silence, to the briefest possible explanation of some of the less obvious allusions, and to the quotation of a few parallel passages which, not being noted by others, seemed to me peculiarly apposite, or which justified unfamiliar usages of words, or which appeared to me to lend the countenance of authority beyond all challenge to expressions to which editors have taken exception as being unnatural, undignified, or inappropriate.

I have, like other translators, occasionally worked in, without special acknowledgment, a phrase from the Bible, from Shakspeare, Milton, or some other immortal, which has now entered into the warp and woof of cultured speech, and which affects the reader with a pleasant thrill of recognition, helping him to realize how the Muses have sometimes touched to the same fine issues great souls dwelling far apart.

In a few instances I have found, on subsequent comparison, that my literal rendering of the whole or a portion of a line has precisely coincided with that of some previous translator. In such cases the identity, being purely accidental, is interesting rather than irritating, and I have made no alteration: indeed, the wonder rather is that versions which in the blank-verse dialogue are so frequently word-for-word renderings, should so seldom slip into these verbal coincidences.

In the lyrical parts of the plays I have marked the distinction of *Strophe* and *Antistrophe*, and observed the metrical correspondences therein involved, not as from a pedantic subservience to a detail which some might imagine to have little interest for the English reader, nor yet as a *tour de force* of metrical and rhyming ingenuity, but for a reason which, though perfectly familiar to the scholar, may require a little explanation for the non-classical reader. We should have a

very inadequate conception of a Greek play if we thought of it simply as a series of stately dialogues maintained between two or three actors, with chorus-chants intervening. It was, in point of fact, much more of the nature of a grand spectacular opera. The theatre, large enough to contain an audience variously estimated at from 15,000 to 30,000, became for the occasion a temple of Dionysus (Bacchus), having his altar at its centre. The drama was the heart of an annual solemn religious festival, and the stage (200 to 300 feet long) was, when the action of the piece justified their introduction, the scene of the grouping and movement of splendid pageants and processions, in which armies of supernumeraries formed a magnificent setting for the tragic interest of dialogue and ode. The Chorus, occupying the *orchestra*, or dancing-area, in front of the stage, grouped themselves, or executed their evolutions, round the altar. While chanting *Strophe* 1, they danced, "with woven paces and with waving hands," from the altar towards the right, returning, with precisely similar music and movements, in *Antistrophe* 1, the rhythmical structure of which must accordingly correspond. In *Strophe* 2 they danced to the left, with (generally) a change of music and movement, returning as before in *Antistrophe* 2; and so on through the series of pairs of stanzas. The occasional odd stanza (*Epode*, if at the end, *Mesode*, if in the middle) was executed round the altar. Now, it must be remembered that all these movements of gliding limb and swaying form were not only rhythmical accompaniments to the words and music, but were in themselves significant, nay, eloquent, among a race who (like some peoples of southern Europe in our own day) carried pantomimic gesture to such perfection that a conversation might be carried on, or a public address delivered, without the utterance of a single articulate word. Hence, the preserva-

tion of the distinction of *Strophe* and *Antistrophe* helps the reader to realize the scene—the utter absence of monotony, the continual variations as melody melted into melody, the ever-changing grace of posture and harmony of movement, interpreting each thought, and accordant to the ringing voices, which held the audience spell-bound, with ears entranced and faces that, “forgetting themselves to marble,” gazed and yearned to where “the white vests of the chorus seemed to wave up a live air.” The sweetest voices, the most exquisite dancing, in all Hellas, the most perfect delivery of the noblest poetry, *tableaux vivants* of gorgeous pageantry—we can understand how an audience would sit out play after play unwearied, and can conceive that there may have been some foundation for the complaint of an economical senate, that the “staging” of the plays (perhaps a dozen) at a single dramatic festival was as costly as a campaign.

As to the reproduction in English of the actual metres of the original (attempted by some, and thought desirable by others), the prosodical structure of the two languages is so fundamentally different (to say nothing of the fact that no living man knows certainly how Euripides’ contemporaries pronounced the simplest Greek sentence), that the attempt could not, even as an essay in technique, be successful, nor, if it could, would the utterly unfamiliar measures have any charm for English ears.

The “Arguments” prefixed to the plays are designed rather to serve as introductions than as epitomes of contents. To give the non-classical reader just so much information as might enable him to commence intelligently the perusal of the play, seemed better than the somewhat ungracious practice of anticipating the poet in his story, and taking the edge off the interest beforehand. In the same client’s interest it may here be mentioned that the chorus, represented by its leader, frequently takes part with the actors

in the dialogue, and that a secondary function of the choral odes was to carry the audience over the interval supposed to elapse between the acts, and which might vary from a few minutes, as in the *Alcestis* (568-605), to several days, or even weeks, as in the *Suppliants* (598-633). The convention was understood, and the illusion was no more impaired by the continued presence of the same chorus in the *orchestra*, than it is in a modern theatre by our consciousness that the same actors are waiting behind the scenes; and certainly men's minds were not jarred by a sense of discord, and brought down from heaven to earth, as with us, when the descent of the curtain on a scene which has thrilled the house with high-wrought emotion is followed by a babble of gossip and by the shrill importunities of waiters.

Certain obvious *lacunæ* in the text (e.g., *Alcestis*, 468, *Suppliants*, 263 and 764), I have supplied, either adopting the conjecture of some editor, or by inserting a relevant connection of my own devising.

The spelling of Greek proper names is still in the transition stage, and I have therefore taken the questionable benefit of the license yet allowed. Old forms, familiar and firmly rooted, like *Hecuba*, I have not disturbed; new forms well established, like *Odysseus*, I have adopted; in well-known names, like *Kassandra*, in which the pronunciation is unaffected by the change of a letter, I have preferred the nearer approach to the Greek; for unfamiliar names, transliteration seemed advisable. I have retained, however, the Latin termination *-us*, because of the apparently invincible tendency of the English reader to place a secondary accent on *-os*, the resulting *-oss* producing a rhythmical discord; and I regard *u* and *y* respectively as closer equivalents than *ou* and *u* for the sound of *ov* and *v*.

In the numbering of the lines, and in the arrangement of the choruses (the reader who refers to the Greek text will

understand why, simply for appearance' sake, the latter are counted by tens), I have followed Paley,¹ with, I believe, but one deviation in this volume, viz., where, in the *Hippolytus*, l. 817 sqq., I have adopted Mahaffy and Bury's strobic arrangement.

I have taken the plays in the commonly received chronological order. This gives to the reader the interest of tracing the development of the poet's genius (so far as can be judged from eighteen plays remaining out of about eighty), and seems preferable to the plan, adopted by earlier translators, of grouping the plays according to subjects (Trojan War, House of Thebes, etc.), since the interest of a continuous story thus obtained is marred by the fact that certain plays of the same group (e.g., *Hecuba*, *Troades*, *Helena*) are inconsistent with each other, involving situations mutually exclusive, the poet not having followed the same legend throughout the series. Subjoined is a list of the plays in chronological order (conjectural), dates being given where regarded as fairly certain :—

- 480 Euripides born. Year of Thermopylæ and Salamis.
- 455 First representation of a play by Euripides.
- 439 *Alcestis*.
- 431 *Medea*. Peloponnesian War begins, lasting till after Euripides' death.
- 429 *Hippolytus*.
- Hecuba*.
- Ion*.
- 420 *Suppliants*. Athens allied with Argos, and at war with Thebes.
- Andromache*.
- Heracleidæ*. Athens at war with Argos.

¹ The school editions of separate plays, where these give a later opinion than his larger work.

415 *Troades*.

Electra.

413 *Helena*.

Hercules Furens.

In 413 occurred the destruction of an Athenian armament in Sicily, survivors from which are said by Plutarch to have been indebted to their acquaintance with Euripides' works for merciful treatment from their conquerors.

411 *Phænissæ*.

408 *Orestes*.

406 Euripides dies. Sophocles, with all Athens, put on mourning for him. The *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, perhaps the *Iphigeneia in Tauris*, and the *Bacchæ* were represented shortly after his death. The *Rhesus*, if written by Euripides, which is disputed, was probably the earliest of his extant plays.

405 Aristophanes' comedy of the *Frogs* represented, having for its object to exalt the memory of Aeschylus, by belittling that of Euripides.

404 Athens taken by the Spartan general, Lysander. Plutarch records that the emotions stirred in the hearts of the victors by the recitation of a passage from the *Electra* turned them from their purpose of destroying the city.

The life of Euripides, his relation to contemporary thought, the discussion of various interesting problems, such as the poet's attitude towards women and towards religion, his dramatic innovations, his use of the *deus ex machinâ*, and so forth, I must postpone to succeeding volumes. One literary question, however, on which the right understanding of the *Alcestis* depends, could not well be postponed: I have therefore treated it in the appendix to this volume.

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ALCESTIS

ARGUMENT.

APOLLO, being banished for a season from Olympus, and condemned to do service to a mortal, became herdsman of Admetus, King of Pheræ in Thessaly. Yet he loathed not his earthly taskmaster, but loved him, for that he was a just man, and hospitable exceedingly. Wherefore he obtained from the Fates this boon for Admetus, that, when his hour of death should come, they should accept in ransom for his life the life of whosoever should have before consented to die in his stead. Now when this was made known, none of them which were nearest by blood to the king would promise to be his ransom in that day. Then Alcestis his wife, the daughter of Pelias King of Iolkos, pledged her to die for him. Of her love she did it, and for the honour of wifehood. And the years passed by, and the tale was told in many lands; and all men praised Alcestis, but Admetus bore a burden of sorrow, for day by day she became dearer to him, a wife wholly true, a mother most loving, and a lady to her thralls gentle exceedingly. But when it was known by tokens that the day was come, Admetus repented him sorely, but it availed not, for no mortal may recall a pledge once given to the Gods. And on that day there came to the palace Apollo to plead with Death for Alcestis' sake; and a company of Elders of Pheræ, to ask of her state and to make mourning for her. And when she was dead, ere she was borne forth to burial, came Hêrakles, son of Zeus, in his journeying, seeking the guest's right of meat and lodging, but not knowing aught of that which had come to pass. Of him was a great deliverance wrought, which is told herein.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APOLLO

DEATH

CHORUS, *composed of Elders of Pheræ*

HANDMAID

ALCESTIS, *daughter of Pelias, and wife of Admetus*

ADMETUS, *King of Pheræ*

EUMELUS, *son of Admetus and Alcestis*

HERAKLES

PHERES, *father of Admetus*

SERVANT, *steward of the palace*

Guards, attendants, handmaids, and mourners

The scene throughout is in front of the palace of Admetus
at Pheræ.

ALCESTIS.

Enter Apollo.

APOLLO.

HALLS of Admetus, where I stooped my pride
To brook the fare of serfs, yea I, a God ;—
The fault was fault of Zeus : he slew my son
Asklêpius—hurled the levin through his heart.
Wroth for the dead, his smiths of heavenly fire 5
I slew, the Cyclopes ; and, for blood-atonement,
Serf to a mortal man my father made me.
To this land came I, tended mine host's kine,
And warded still his house unto this day.
Righteous myself, I lighted on the righteous, 10
The son of Pheres : him I snatched from death,
Cozening the Fates : to me the Sisters pledged them
That imminent death Admetus should escape
If he for ransom gave another life.
To all he ~~went~~—all near and dear,—and asked 15
Grey sire, the mother that had given him life ;
But, save his wife, found none that would consent
For him to die and never more see light.
Now in his arms upborne within yon home
She gaspeth forth her life : for on this day 20

Her weird it is to die and part from life.
 I, lest pollution taint me in their house,
 Go forth of yonder hall's belovèd roof. [*Enter Death.*
 Lo, yonder Death !—I see him nigh at hand,
 Priest of the dead, who comes to hale her down 25
 To Hades' halls—well hath he kept his time,
 Watching this day, whereon she needs must die.

DEATH.

Ha, thou at the palace !—Wilt not make room,
 Phœbus ?—thou wrestest the right yet again.
 Thou removest the landmarks of Gods of Gloom. 30
 And thou makest their honours vain.
 Did this not suffice thee, to thwart that doom
 Of Admetus, when, all by thy cunning beguiled
 Were the Fates, that thou now must be warding the
 wife [35
 With thine hand made ready the bowstring to strain,
 Though she pledged her from death to redeem with
 her life

Her lord,—she, Pelias' child ?

APOLLO.

Fear not : fair words and justice are with me.

DEATH.

Justice with thee !—what needeth then the bow ?

APOLLO.

This ?—'tis my wont to bear it evermore. 40

DEATH.

Yea, and to aid yon house in lawless wise.

APOLLO.

Mine heart is heavy for my friend's mischance.

DEATH.

What, wilt thou wrest from me this second corpse ?

APOLLO.

Nay, not that other did I take by force.

DEATH.

Not ?—why on earth then ?—why not underground ? 45

APOLLO.

She was his ransom, she for whom thou comest.

DEATH.

Yea, and will hale her deep beneath the earth.

APOLLO.

Take her and go : I trow I shall not bend thee—

DEATH.

To slay the victim due ?—mine office this.

APOLLO.

Nay, but to smite with death the ripe for death. 50

DEATH.

Ay, I discern thy plea,—thy zeal, good sooth !

APOLLO.

And may Alcestis never see old age ?

DEATH.

Never :—should I not love mine honours too ?

APOLLO.

'Tis soon or late,—thou canst but take one life.

DEATH.

Yet mine the goodlier prize when die the young. 55

APOLLO.

Think—royal obsequies if old she die !

DEATH.

Lo, Phœbus making laws to shield the rich !

APOLLO.

How say'st thou ?—thou a sophist unawares !

DEATH.

Would wealth not buy the boon of dying old ?

APOLLO.

So then thou wilt not grant this grace to me ? 60

DEATH.

Nay surely—dost not know my wonted way ?

APOLLO.

Hateful to mortals this, and loathed of Gods.

DEATH.

All things beyond thy rights thou canst not have.

APOLLO.

Surely thou shalt forbear, though ruthless thou,
 So mighty a man to Pheres' halls shall come, 65
 Sent of Eurystheus forth, the courser-car
 From winter-dreary lands of Thrace to bring.
 Guest-welcomed in Admetus' palace here,
 By force yon woman shall he wrest from thee.
 Yea, thou of me shalt have no thank for this, 70
 And yet shalt do it, and shalt have mine hate.

[Exit Apollo.]

DEATH.

Talk on, talk on : no profit shalt thou win.
 This woman down to Hades' halls shall pass.
 For her I go : my sword shall seal her ours :
 For sacred to the Nether Gods is he, 75
 He from whose head this sword hath shorn the hair.

[Exit Death.]

Enter Chorus, dividing to right and left, so that the sections answer one another till they unite at l. 112.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

What meaneth this hush afront of the hall ?
 The home of Admetus, why voiceless all ?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

No friend of the house who should speak of its plight
 Is nigh, who should bid that we raise the keen 80
 For the dead, or should tell us that yet on the light
 Alcestis looketh, and liveth the Queen,
 The daughter of Pelias, the noblest, I ween,
 Yea, in all men's sight
 The noblest of women on earth that have been. 85

HALF-CHORUS 1.

(Str. 1)

Or hearest thou mourning or sighing
 Or beating of hands,
 Or the wail of bereaved ones outcrying?
 No handmaid stands
 At the palace-gate. 90
 O Healer, appear for the dying, appear as a bright
 bird flying
 'Twixt the surges of fate!

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Ah, they would not be hushed, had the life of her
 flown!

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Not forth of the doors is the death-train gone.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Whence cometh thine hope, which I boast not mine
 own? 95

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Would the King without pomp of procession have
 yielded the Grave the possession
 Of so dear, of so faithful an one?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

(Ant. 1)

Nor the cup in the gateway appeareth,
 From the spring that they bear
 To the gate that pollution feareth, 100
 Nor the severed hair
 In the porch for the dead,

Which the mourner in bitterness sheareth, neither
 beating of hands one heareth
 On maiden's head.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Yet surely is this the appointed day— 105

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Ah ! what wilt thou say ?

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Whereon of her doom she must pass to the tomb.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

With a keen pang's smart hast thou stabbed mine heart.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

It is meet, when the good are as flowers plucked away,
 That in sorrow's gloom
 Should the breast of the old tried friend have part.

CHORUS.

(*Str.* 2)

Though ye voyage all seas,
 Ye shall light on no lands,
 Nor on Lycia's leas,
 Nor Ammonian sands, 115
 Whence redemption shall come for the wretched, or
 loosing of Death's dread bands.

Doom's imminent slope
 Is a precipice-steep.
 In no God is there hope,

120

Though his altars should weep
 With the crimson atonement, should veil them in
 clouds of the hecatomb-sheep.

(*Ant.* 2)

Ah, once there was one!—
 Were life's light in the eyes
 Of Phœbus's son,

Then our darling might rise 125
 From the mansions of darkness, through portals of
 Hades return to our skies ;

For he raised up the dead,
 Ere flashed from the heaven,
 From Zeus' hand sped,
 That bolt of the levin.

But now what remaineth to wait for?—what hope of
 her life is given? 130

No sacrifice more
 Unrendered remaineth :
 No God, but the gore
 From his altars down-raineth :

Yet healing is none for our ills, neither balm that the
 spirit sustaineth. 135

[*Enter Handmaid.*

But hither cometh of the handmaids one,
 Weeping the while. What tidings shall I hear?
 To grieve at all mischance unto thy lords
 May be forgiven ; but if thy lady lives
 Or even now hath passed, fain would we know. 140

HANDMAID.

She liveth, and is dead : both may'st thou say.

CHORUS.

Ay so?—how should the same be dead and live?

HANDMAID.

Even now she droopeth, gasping out her life.

CHORUS.

Noble and stricken—how noble she thou lovest

HANDMAID.

His depth of loss he knows not ere it come. 145

CHORUS.

And hope—is no hope left her life to save?

HANDMAID.

None—for the day foredoomed constraineth her.

CHORUS.

Are all things meet, then, being done for her?

HANDMAID.

Yea, ready is her burial-attire.

CHORUS.

Let her be sure that glorious she dies 150
And noblest woman 'neath the sun's wide way.

HANDMAID.

Noblest?—how not?—what tongue will dare gainsay?
What must the woman be who passeth her?
How could a wife give honour to her lord
More than by yielding her to die for him? 155

and this—yea, all the city knoweth this.
 But what within she did, hear thou, and marvel.
 For when she knew that the appointed day
 Was come, in river-water her white skin
 He bathed, and from the cedar-chests took forth 160
 Vesture and jewels, and decked her gloriously,
 And stood before the hearth, and prayed, and said :
 Queen, for I pass beneath the earth, I fall
 Before thee now, and nevermore, and pray :—
 Be mother to my orphans : mate with him 165
 My loving wife, with her a noble husband. ?
 For, as their mother dieth, so may they,
 My children, die untimely, but with wealth
 In the home-land fill up a life of bliss.”
 So all the altars through Admetus’ halls 170
 He went, with wreaths she hung them, and she prayed,
 Lucking the while the tresses of the myrtle,
 Fearless, unsighing, and the imminent fate
 Hangs not the lovely rose-tint of her cheek.
 Then to her bower she rushed, fell on the bed ; X 175
 And there, O there she wept, and thus she speaks :
 “ O couch, whereon I loosed the maiden zone
 For this man, for whose sake I die to-day,
 Farewell : I hate thee not. Me hast thou lost,
 I alone : loth to fail thee and my lord 180
 I die : but thee another bride shall own,
 Not more true-hearted ; happier perchance.”
 Then falls thereon, and kisses : all the bed
 Is watered with the flood of melting eyes.
 But having wept her fill of many tears, 185
 Drooping she goeth, reeling from the couch ;
 Yet oft, as forth the bower she passed, returned,
 And flung herself again upon the couch.

And the babes, clinging to their mother's robes,
 Were weeping : and she clasped them in her arms, 190
 Fondling now this, now that, as one death-doomed.
 And all the servants 'neath the roof were weeping,
 Pitying their lady. But to each she stretched
 Her right hand forth ; and none there was so mean
 To whom she spake not and received reply. 195
 Such are the ills Admetus' home within.
 Now, had he died, he had ended : but, in 'scaping,
 He bears a pain that he shall ne'er forget.

CHORUS.

Doth not Admetus groan for this affliction
 Of such a noble wife to be bereft ? 200

HANDMAID.

Ay, weeps, and clasps his dear one in his arms,
 And prays, "Forsake me not !"—asking the while
 The impossible, for still she wanes and wastes,
 Drooping her hand, a misery-burdened weight.
 But yet, albeit hardly breathing now, 205
 To the sun's rays fain would she lift her eyes,
 As nevermore, but for the last time then
 Destined to see the sun's beam and his orb.
 But I will go and make thy presence known :
 For 'tis not all that love so well their kings 210
 As to stand by them, in afflictions loyal.
 But from of old my lords were loved of thee. [*Exit.*

[*Nine members of the Chorus chant successively :—*

CHORUS 1.

O Zeus, for our lords is there nought but despair ?
 No path through the tangle of evils, no loosing of
 chains that have bound them ?

CHORUS 2.

No tidings?—remaineth but rending of hair,
And the stricken ones turned to the tomb with the
garments of sorrow around them?

CHORUS 3.

Even so—even so! yet uplift we in prayer
Our hands to the Gods, for that power from the days
everlasting hath crowned them.

CHORUS 4.

O Healer-king, 220
Find thou for Admetus the balm of relief, for the
captive deliverance!

CHORUS 5.

Vouchsafe it, vouchsafe it, for heretofore
Hast thou found out a way; even now once more
Pluck back our belovèd from Hades' door,
Strike down Death's hand red-reeking with gore!

CHORUS 6.

Woe's me! woe's me!—let the woe-dirge ring!
Ah, scion of Pheres, alas for thy lot, for love's long
severance!

CHORUS 7.

For such things on his sword might a man not fall,
Or knit up his throat in the noose 'twixt the heaven
and the earth that quivereth? 230

CHORUS 8.

For his dear one—nay, but his dearest of all
Shall he see on this day lying dead, while her spirit by
Lêthê shivereth.

CHORUS 9.

O look!—look yonder, where forth of the hall
She cometh, and he at her side whose life by her life
she delivereth.

CHORUS, UNITED.

Cry, Land Pheraïan, shrill the keen!
Lift up thy voice to wail thy best
There dying, and thy queenliest
Slow wasting to the Gates Unseen!

Tell me not this, that wedlock brings
To them that wed more bliss than woe.
I look back to the long-ago;
I muse on these unhappiest things.

240

Lo, here a king—he forfeiteth
The truest heart, the noblest wife:
And what shall be henceforth his life?
A darkened day, a living death.

*Enter Female Attendants bearing Alcestis, accompanied
by Admetus and Children.*

ALCESTIS.

O Sun, and the day's dear light,
And ye clouds through the wheeling heaven in the
race everlasting flying!

ADMETUS.

He seeth thee and me, two stricken ones,
Which wrought the Gods no wrong, that thou shouldst
die.

ALCESTIS.

O Land, O stately height
Of mine halls, and my bridal couch in Iolkos my father-
land lying !

ADMETUS.

Uplift thee, hapless love, forsake me not, 250
And pray the mighty Gods in ruth to turn.

ALCESTIS.

I see the Boat with the oars twin-sweeping,
And, his hand on the pole as in haste aye keeping,
Charon the Ferryman calleth, "What ho, wilt thou
linger and linger ?
Hasten,—'tis thou dost delay me!" he crieth with
beckoning finger.

ADMETUS.

Ah me! a bitter ferrying this thou namest !
O evil-starred, what woes endure we now !

ALCESTIS.

One haleth me—haleth me hence to the mansion
Of the dead!—dost thou mark not the darkling
expansion
Of the pinions of Hades, the blaze of his eyes 'neath
their caverns out-glaring ? 260

What wouldst thou?—Unhand me!—In anguish and
pain by what path am I faring!

ADMETUS.

Woeful to them that love thee: most to me
And to thy babes, sad sharers in this grief.

ALCESTIS.

Let be—let me sink back to rest me :
There is no strength left in my feet.
Hades is near, and the night
Is darkening down on my sight.
Darlings, farewell : on the light 270
Long may ye look :—I have blessed ye
Ere your mother to nothingness fleet.

ADMETUS.

Ah me ! for thy word rusheth bitterness o'er me
Bitterness passing the anguish of death !
Forsake me not now, by the Gods I implore thee,
By the babes thou wilt orphan, O yield not thy
breath !
Look up, be of cheer : if thou diest, before me
Is nothingness. Living, we aye live thine,
And we die unto thee ; for our hearts are a shrine
Wherein for thy love passing word we adore thee !

ALCESTIS.

Admetus,—for thou seest all my plight,— 280
Fain would I speak mine heart's wish ere I die.
I, honouring thee, and setting thee in place
Before mine own soul still to see this light,
Am dying, unconstrained to die for thee.

I might have wed what man Thessalian 28.
I would, have dwelt wealth-crowned in princely halls
Yet would not live on, torn away from thee,
With orphaned children : wherefore spared I not
The gifts of youth still mine, wherein I joyed.
Yet she that bare, he that begat, forsook thee, 29
Though fair for death their time of life was come,
Yea, fair, to save their son and die renowned.
Their only one wert thou : no hope there was
To get them sons thereafter, hadst thou died.
So had I lived, and thou, to after days : 29
Thou wert not groaning, of thy wife bereaved,
Thy children motherless. Howbeit this
Some God hath brought to pass : it was to be.
Let be :—remember thou what thank is due
For this : I never can ask full requital ;— 30
For nought there is more precious than the life ;—
Yet justly due : for these thy babes thou lovest
No less than I, if that thine heart be right.
Suffer that they have lordship in mine home :
Wed not a stepdame to supplant our babes, 30
Whose heart shall tell her she is no Alcestis,
Whose jealous hand shall smite them, thine and mine
Do not, ah, do not this—I pray thee, I.
For the new stepdame hateth still the babes
Of her that's gone with more than viper-venom. 31
The boy—his father is his tower of strength
To whom to speak, of whom to win reply :
But, O my child, what girlhood will be thine ?
To thee what would she be, thy father's yoke-mate ?
What if with ill report she smirched thy name, 31
And in thy youth's flower marred thy marriage-hopes
For thee thy mother ne'er shall deck for bridal,

Nor hearten thee in travail, O my child,
 There, where nought gentler than the mother is.
 For I must die, nor shall it be tomorn, 320
 Nor on the third day comes on me this bane :
 Straightway of them that are not shall I be.
 Farewell, be happy. Now for thee, my lord,
 Abides the boast to have won the noblest wife,
 For you, my babes, to have sprung from noblest
 mother. 325

CHORUS.

Fear not ; for I am bold to speak for him
 This will he do, an if he be not mad.

ADMETUS.

It shall, it shall be, dread not thou : for thee)
 Living I had ; and dead, mine only wife
 Shalt thou be called : nor ever in thy stead 330
 Shall bride Thessalian hail me as her lord.
 None is there of a father so high-born,
 None so for beauty peerless among women.
 Children enough have I : I pray the Gods
 For joy in these—our joy in thee is nought. 335
 Not for a year's space will I mourn for thee,
 But long as this my life shall last, dear wife,
 Loathing my mother, hating mine own sire,
 For in word only, not in deed, they loved me.
 Thou gav'st in ransom for my life thine all 340
 Of precious, and didst save. Do I not well
 To groan, who lose such yokefellow in thee ?
 Revels shall cease, and gatherings at the wine,
 Garlands, and song, which wont to fill mine house.
 For never more mine hand shall touch the lyre : 345

Nor will I lift up heart to sing to flute
 Of Libya : thou hast robbed my life of mirth.
 And, wrought by craftsmen's cunning hands, thy form
 Imaged, upon a couch outstretched shall lie,
 Falling whereon, and clasping with mine hands, 350
 Calling thy name, in fancy shall mine arms
 Hold my belovèd, though I hold her not :—
 A chill delight, I wot : yet shall I lift
 The burden from my soul. In dreams shalt thou
 Haunt me and gladden : sweet to see the loved, 355
 Though but a fleeting presence night-revealed.
 But, were the tongue and strain of Orpheus mine,
 To witch Demeter's Daughter and her lord,
 And out of Hades by my song to win thee,
 I had fared down : nor Pluto's Hound had stayed me,
 Nor Spirit-wafter Charon at the oar, [360
 Or ever I restored thy life to light.
 Yet there look thou for me, whenso I die ;
 Prepare a home, as who shall dwell with me.
 For in the selfsame cedar chest, wherein 365
 Thou liest, will I bid them lay my bones
 Outstretched beside thee : ne'er may I be severed,
 No, not in death, from thee, my one true friend.

CHORUS.

Yea, I withal will mourn, as friend with friend,
 With thee for this thy wife, for she is worthy. 370

ALCESTIS.

My children, ye yourselves have heard all this,
 Have heard your father pledge him ne'er to wed
 For your oppression and for my dishonour.

ADMETUS.

Yea, now I say it, and I will perform.

ALCESTIS.

On these terms take the children from mine hand. 375

ADMETUS.

I take them—precious gift from precious hand.

ALCESTIS.

Be to these babes a mother in my stead.

ADMETUS.

Sore is their need, who are bereft of thee.

ALCESTIS.

Darlings, I should have lived ; and lo, I die.

ADMETUS.

Ah me !—what shall I do, forlorn of thee ? 380

ALCESTIS.

Time shall bring healing :—but the dead is nought.

ADMETUS.

Take me, ah take me with thee to the grave !

ALCESTIS.

Suffice it that one dies—she dies for thee.

ADMETUS.

O Death, of what a wife dost thou bereave me !

ALCESTIS.

Dark—dark—mine eyes are drooping, heavy-laden. 385

ADMETUS.

Oh, I am lost if thou wilt leave me, wife !

ALCESTIS.

No more—I am no more : as nought account me.

ADMETUS.

✓ Uplift thy face : forsake not thine own children !

ALCESTIS.

Sore loth do I—yet O farewell, my babes !

ADMETUS.

Look unto them—O look !

ALCESTIS.

I am no more. 390

ADMETUS.

Ah, leav'st thou us ?

ALCESTIS.

Farewell. [Dies.

ADMETUS.

O wretch undone !

CHORUS.

Gone,—gone !—No more is this Admetus' wife !

EUMELUS.

Woe for my lot!—to the tomb hath my mother descended, descended!

Never again, O my father, she seeth the light of the sun!

In anguish she leaves us forsaken: the story is ended, is ended,

Of her sheltering love, and the tale of the motherless life is begun.

Look—look on her eyelids, her hands drooping nerveless! O hear me, O hear me! 400

It is I—I beseech thee, my mother!—thine own little, own little bird!

It is I—O, I cast me upon thee—thy lips are so near me, so near me,

Unto mine am I pressing them, mother!—I plead for a word—but a word!

ADMETUS.

With her who heareth not, nor seeth: ye

And I are stricken with a heavy doom. 405

EUMELUS.

And I am but a little one, father—so young, and forsaken, forsaken,

Forlorn of my mother—O hapless! a weariful lot shall be mine!

And thou, little maiden, my sister, the burden hast taken, hast taken,

Which thy brother may bear not alone, and a weariful lot shall be thine. 410

O father, of long-living love was thy marriage un-
cherished, uncherished :

Thou hast won not the goal of old age with the love
of thy youth at thy side ;

For, or ever she won to the fulness of days, she hath
perished, hath perished ;

And the home is a wreck and a ruin, for thou, O my
mother, hast died !

CHORUS.

Admetus, this mischance thou needs must bear.)
Not first of mortals thou, nor shalt be last
To lose a noble wife ; and, be thou sure,
From us, from all, this debt is due—to die.

ADMETUS.

I know it : nowise unforeseen this ill 420
Hath swooped upon me : long I grieved to know it.
But—for to burial must I bear my dead—
Stay ye, and, tarrying, echo back my wail
To that dark God whom no drink-offerings move.
And all Thessalians over whom I rule 425
I bid take part in mourning for this woman,
With shaven head and sable-shrouding robe.
And ye which yoke the cars four-horsed, or steeds
Of single frontlet, shear with steel their manes.
Music of flutes the city through, or lyres, 430
Be none, while twelve moons round their circles out :
For dearer dead, nor kinder unto me
I shall not bury : worthy of mine honour
Is she, for she alone hath died for me. [Exit.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

O Pelias' daughter, I hail thee :
I waft thee eternal farewell
To thine home where the darkness must veil thee,
Where in Hades unsunned thou shalt dwell.
Know, Dark-haired, thy grey Spirit-wafer
Hath sped not with twy-plashing oar 440
Woman nobler, nor shall speed hereafter
To Acheron's shore.

(Ant. 1)

For the seven-stringed shell, or for pæan
Unharped, shall thy fame be a song,
When o'er Sparta the moon Karnean
High rideth the whole night long.
And in Athens the wealthy and splendid
Shall thy name on her bards' lips ring,
Such a theme hast thou left to be blended
With the lays that they sing.

(Str. 2)

O that the power were but in me,
From the chambers of Hades, to light,
And from streams of Cocytus, to win thee
With the oar of the River of Night !
O dear among women, strong-hearted 460
From Hades to ransom thy lord !
Never spirit in such wise departed.
Light lie on thee, Lady, the sward !
And, if ever thine husband shall mate him
Again with a bride in thy stead,
I will loathe him, his children shall hate him,
The babes of the dead.

(Ant. 2)

When his mother would not be contented
 To hide her for him in the tomb,
 Nor his grey-haired father consented,
 Unholpen he looked on his doom.
 Whom they bare—the hard-hearted!—they cared
 not,
 Though hoary their locks were, to save! 470
 Thou art gone, for thy great love spared not
 Thy blossom of youth from the grave.
 Ah, may it be mine, such communion
 Of hearts!—'tis vouchsafed unto few:—
 Then ours should be sorrowless union
 Our life-days through.

Enter Herakles.

HERAKLES.

Strangers, who dwell in this Pheraia land,
 Say, do I find Admetus in his home?

CHORUS.

Herakles, in his home is Pheres' son.
 Yet say, what brings thee to Thessalian land,
 That thou shouldst come to this Pheraia town? 480

HERAKLES.

A toil for King Eurystheus, lord of Tiryns.

CHORUS.

And whither journeyest? To what wanderings yoked?

HERAKLES.

For Thracian Diomedes' four-horsed chariot.

CHORUS.

How canst thou? Sure he is unknown to thee!

HERAKLES.

Unknown: to land Bistonian fared I never. 485

CHORUS.

Not save by battle may those steeds be won.

HERAKLES.

Yet flinch I may not from the appointed toils.

CHORUS.

Thy life or his—a triumph or a grave.

HERAKLES.

Not this the first time I have run such course.

CHORUS.

What profit is it if thou slay their lord? 490

HERAKLES.

Those steeds shall I drive back to Tiryns' king.

CHORUS.

Hard task, to set the bit betwixt their jaws.

HERAKLES.

That shall I, if their nostrils breathe not fire.

CHORUS.

Yea, but with ravening jaws do they rend men.

HERAKLES.

Go to—thus banquet mountain-beasts, not horses. 495

CHORUS.

Nay, thou shalt see their cribs with gore bespattered.

HERAKLES.

Whom boasteth he for father, he that reared them?

CHORUS.

Arês, the king of Thracia's golden shield.

HERAKLES.

Thou say'st : such toil my fate imposeth still,
Harsh evermore, uphillward straining aye, 500
If I must still in battle close with sons
Gotten of Arês ; with Lykaon first,
And Kyknus then : and lo, I come to grapple—
The third strife this—with yon steeds and their lord.
But never man shall see Alkmênê's child 505
Quailing before the hand of any foe.

CHORUS.

Lo, there himself, the ruler of the land,
Admetus, cometh forth his palace-hall.

Enter Admetus.

ADMETUS.

Hail, O thou sprung from Zeus' and Perseus' blood !

HERAKLES.

Admetus, hail thou too, Thessalia's king. 510

ADMETUS.

Hale?—Would I were! Yet thy good heart I know.

HERAKLES.

Wherefore for mourning shaven show'st thou thus?

ADMETUS.

This day must I commit to earth a corpse.

HERAKLES.

Now heaven forefend thou mourn'st for children dead!

ADMETUS.

In mine home live the babes whom I begat. 515

HERAKLES.

Sooth, death-ripe were thy sire, if he be gone.

ADMETUS.

He liveth, and my mother, Herakles.

HERAKLES.

Surely, O surely, not thy wife, Admetus?

ADMETUS.

Twofold must be mine answer touching her.

HERAKLES.

Or hath she died, say'st thou, or liveth yet? 520

ADMETUS.

She is, and she is not: here lies my sorrow.

HERAKLES.

Nothing the more I know : dark sayings thine.

ADMETUS.

Know'st not the doom whereon she needs must light ?

HERAKLES.

I know she pledged herself to die for thee.

ADMETUS.

How lives she then, if she to this consented ? 525

HERAKLES.

Mourn not thy wife ere dead : abide the hour.

ADMETUS.

Dead is the doomed, and no more is the dead.

HERAKLES.

Diverse are these—to be and not to be.

ADMETUS.

This, Herakles, thy sentence : that is mine.

HERAKLES.

But now, why weep'st thou ? What dear friend is
dead ? 530

ADMETUS.

A woman—hers the memory we mourn.

HERAKLES.

Some stranger born, or nigh of kin to thee ?

ADMETUS.

A stranger born ; yet near and dear to us.

HERAKLES.

How died a stranger then in house of thine ?

ADMETUS.

An orphan here she dwelt, her father dead. 535

HERAKLES.

Would we had found thee mourning not, Admetus.

ADMETUS.

Ay so?—what purpose lurketh 'neath thy word ?

HERAKLES.

On will I to another host's hearth-welcome.

ADMETUS.

It cannot be : may no such evil come !

HERAKLES.

A burden unto mourners comes the guest. 540

ADMETUS.

Dead are the dead :—but enter thou mine house.

HERAKLES.

'Twere shame to banquet in the house of weeping.

ADMETUS.

Aloof the guest-bowers are where we will lodge thee.

HERAKLES.

Let me pass on, and have my thanks unmeasured.

ADMETUS.

Unto another's hearth thou canst not go. 545

[*To an attendant*] Ho thou, lead on : open the guest-bowers looking

Away from these our chambers. Tell my stewards
To set on meat in plenty. Shut withal

The mid-court doors : it fits not that the guests,
The while they feast, hear wailings, and be vexed. 550

[*Exit Herakles.*]

CHORUS.

What dost thou ?—such affliction at the door,
And guests for thee, Admetus ? Art thou mad ?

ADMETUS.

But had I driven him from my home and city
Who came my guest, then hadst thou praised me more ?

Nay, sooth ; for mine affliction so had grown 555

No less, and more inhospitable I ;

And to mine ills were added this beside,

That this my home were called "Guest-hating Hall."

Yea, and myself have proved him kindest host

Whene'er to Argos' thirsty plain I fared. 560

CHORUS.

Why hide then the dread Presence in the house,
When came a friend ?—Thyself hast named him friend.

ADMETUS.

Never had he been won to pass my doors,
Had he one whit of mine afflictions known.

To some, I wot, not wise herein I seem, 565
 Nor wilt thou praise : but mine halls have not learnt
 To thrust away nor to dishonour guests.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Halls thronged of the guests ever welcome, O dwelling
 Of a hero, for ever the home of the free,
 The Lord of the lyre-strings sweet beyond telling, 570
 Apollo, hath deigned to sojourn in thee,
 Amid thine habitations, a shepherd of sheep,
 The flocks of Admetus he scorned not to keep,
 While the shepherds' bridal-strains, soft-swelling
 From his pipe, pealed over the slant-sloped lea.

(Ant. 1)

And the spotted lynxes for joy of thy singing
 Mixed with thy flocks ; and from Othrys' dell 580
 Trooped tawny lions : the witchery-winged
 Notes brought dancing around thy shell,
 Phœbus, the dappled fawn from the shadow
 Of the tall-tressed pines tripping forth to the meadow,
 Beating time to the chime of the rapture-ringing
 Music, with light feet tranced by its spell.

(Str. 2)

Wherefore the flocks of my lord unnumbered
 By the Bœbian mere, fair-rippling stray : 590
 Where the steeds of the sun halt, darkness-cumbered,
 By Molossian marches, far away
 The borders lie of his golden grain,
 And his rolling stretches of pasture-plain ;
 And the havenless beach Aegean hath slumbered
 Under Pelion long 'neath the peace of his sway.

(Ant. 2)

And now, with the tears from his eyes fast-raining,
 Thrown wide are his palace-doors to the guest,
 While newly his heart 'neath its burden is straining,
 For the wife that hath died in his halls distressed.
 For to honour's heights are the high-born lifted, [600
 And the good are with truest wisdom gifted ;
 And there broods on mine heart bright trust unwaning
 That the god-reverer shall yet be blest.

ADMETUS.

O kindly presence of Pheraïan men,
 This corpse even now, with all things meet, my servants
 Bear on their shoulders to the tomb and pyre.
 Wherefore, as custom is, hail ye the dead,
 On the last journey as she goeth forth. 610

CHORUS.

Lo, I behold thy sire with aged foot
 Advancing, and attendants in their hands
 Bear ornaments to deck the dead withal.

[Enter Pheres with Attendants bearing gifts.]

PHERES.

I come in thine afflictions sorrowing, son :
 A noble wife and virtuous hast thou lost, 615
 None will gainsay : yet these calamities
 We needs must bear, how hard to bear soever.
 Receive these ornaments, and let her pass
 Beneath the earth : well may the corpse be honoured
 Of her who for thy life's sake died, my son ; 620
 Who made me not unchilded, left me not

Forlorn of thee to pine in woeful eld.
In all her sisters' eyes she hath crowned her life
With glory, daring such a deed as this.
O saviour of my son, who us upraisedst 625
In act to fall, all hail! May bliss be thine
Even in Hades. Thus to wed, I say,
Profiteth men—or nothing worth is marriage.

ADMETUS.

Bidden of me thou com'st not to this burial,
Nor count I thine the presence of a friend. 630
Thine ornaments she never shall put on ;
She shall be buried needing nought of thine.
Thou grieve!—thou shouldst have grieved in my death-
hour !
Thou stood'st aloof—the old, didst leave the young
To die :—and wilt thou wail upon this corpse ? 635
True father of my body thou wast not ;
Nor she that said she bare me, and was called
My mother, gave me birth : of bondman blood
To thy wife's breast was I brought privily.
Put to the test, thou showedst who thou art, 640
And I account me not thy true-born son.
Peerless of men in soulless cowardice !
So old, and standing on the verge of life,
Yet hadst no will, yet hadst no heart to die
For thine own son!—Ye suffered her, a woman 645
Not of our house, whom I with righteous cause
Might count alone my mother and my father.
Yet here was honour, hadst thou dared the strife,
In dying for thy son. A paltry space
To cling to life in any wise was left. 650
Then had I lived, and she, through days to come,

Nor I, left lorn, should thus mine ills bemoan.
 Yet all that may the fortunate betide
 Fell to thy lot ; in manhood's prime a king :
 Me hadst thou son and heir unto thine house, 655
 So that thou wast not, dying, like to leave
 A childless home for stranger folk to spoil.
 Nor canst thou say that flouting thy grey hairs
 I gave thee o'er to death, whose reverence
 For thee was passing word :—and this the thank 660
 That thou and she that bear me render me !
 Wherefore, make haste : beget thee other sons
 To foster thy grey hairs, to compass thee
 With death's observance, and lay out thy corpse.
 Not I with this mine hand will bury thee. 665
 For thee dead am I. If I see the light,—
 Another saviour found,—I call me son
 To her, and loving fosterer of her age.
 For nought the agèd pray for death's release,
 Plaining of age and weary-wearing time. 670
 Let death draw near—who then would die ? Not one :
 No more is eld a burden unto them.

CHORUS.

O hush ! Suffice the affliction at the doors.
 O son, infuriate not thy father's soul.

PHERES.

Son, whom, think'st thou—some Lydian slave or
 Phrygian 675
 Bought with thy money ?—thus beratest thou ?
 What, know'st thou not that I Thessalian am,
 Sprung from Thessalian sire, free man true-born ?
 This insolence passeth !—hurling malapert words

On me, not lightly thus shalt thou come off! 680
 Thee I begat and nurtured, of mine house
 The heir : no debt is mine to die for thee.
 Not from our sires such custom we received
 That sires for sons should die : no Greek law this.
 Born for thyself wast thou, to fortune good 685
 Or evil : all thy dues from us thou hast.
 O'er many folk thou rulest ; wide demesnes
 Shall I leave thee : to me my fathers left them.
 What is my wrong, my robbery of thee ?
 For me die thou not, I die not for thee. 690
 Thou joy'st to see light—shall thy father joy not ?
 Sooth, I account our time beneath the earth
Long, and our life-space short, yet is it sweet.
 Shamelessly hast thou fought against thy death :
 Thy life is but transgression of thy doom 695
 And murder of thy wife :—*my* cowardice !
 This from thee, dastard ! worsted by a woman
 Who died for thee, the glorious-gallant youth !
 Cunning device hast thou devised to die
 Never, cajoling still wife after wife 700
 To die for thee !—and dost revile thy friends
 Who will not so—and thou the coward, thou ?
 Peace ! e'en bethink thee, if thou lov'st thy life,
 So all love theirs. Thou, if thou speakest evil
 Of us, shalt hear much evil, and that true. 705

CHORUS.

Ye have said too much, thou now, and he before.
 Refrain, old sire, from railing on thy son.

ADMETUS.

Say on, say on ; I have said : if hearing truth

Gall thee, thou shouldest not have done me wrong.

PHERES.

I had done more wrong, had I died for thee. 710

ADMETUS.

What, for the young and old is death the same?

PHERES.

One life to live, not twain—this is our due.

ADMETUS.

Have thy desire—one life outlasting Zeus.

PHERES.

Dost curse thy parents, who hast had no wrong?

ADMETUS.

Ay, whom I marked love-sick for dateless life. 715

PHERES.

What?—art not burying her in thine own stead?

ADMETUS.

A token, dastard, of thy cowardice.

PHERES.

I did her not to death: thou canst not say it.

ADMETUS.

Mayest thou feel thy need of me some day!

PHERES.

Woo many women, that the more may die. 720

ADMETUS.

This taunt strikes thee—'tis thou wast loth to die.

PHERES.

Sweet is yon sun-god's light, yea, it is sweet.

ADMETUS.

Base is thy spirit, and unmeet for men.

PHERES.

No agèd corpse thou bearest, inly laughing!

ADMETUS.

Yet shalt thou die in ill fame, when thou diest. 725

PHERES.

Nought reck I of ill-speaking o'er my grave.

ADMETUS.

Ah me! how full of shamelessness is eld!

PHERES.

Not shameless she,—but senseless hast thou found her.

ADMETUS.

Begone : leave me to bury this my dead.

PHERES.

I go : her murderer will bury her. 730

Thou shalt yet answer for it to her kin.

Surely Akastus is no more a man,

If he of thee claim not his sister's blood. [*Exit Pheres.*]

ADMETUS.

Avaunt, with her that kennelleth with thee !
 Childless grow old, as ye deserve, while lives 735
 Your child : ye shall not come beneath one roof
 With me. If need were to renounce by heralds
 Thy fatherhood, I had renounced it now.
 Let us—for we must bear the present ill—
 Pass on, to lay our dead upon the pyre. 740

CHORUS.

Alas for the loving and daring !
 Farewell to the noblest and best !
 May Hermes conduct thee down-faring
 Kindly, and Hades to rest
 Receive thee ! If any atonement
 For ills even there may betide
 To the good, O thine be enthronement
 By Hades' bride !

[Exeunt omnes in funeral procession.]

Enter Servant.

SERVANT.

Full many a guest, from many a land which came
 Unto Admetus' dwelling, have I known,
 Have set before them meat : but never guest
 More pestilent received I to this hearth : 750
 Who first, albeit he saw my master mourning,
 Entered, and passed the threshold unashamed ;
 Then, nowise courteously received the fare
 Found with us, though our woeful plight he knew,
 But, what we brought not, hectoring bade us bring.
 The ivy cup uplifts he in his hands, [755
 And swills the darkling mother's fiery blood,

Till the wine's flame enwrapped him, heating him.
 Then did he wreath his head with myrtle sprays,
 Dissonant-howling. Diverse strains were heard: 760
 For he sang on, regardless all of ills
 Darkening Admetus' house; we servants wept
 Our mistress: yet we showed not to the guest
 Eyes tear-bedewed, for so Admetus bade.
 And now within the house must I be feasting 765
 This guest,—a lawless thief, a bandit rogue!
 She from the house hath passed: I followed not,
 Nor stretched the hand, nor wailed unto my mistress
 Farewell, who was to me and all the household
 A mother, for from ills untold she saved us, 770
 Assuaging her lord's wrath. Do I not well
 To loathe this guest, intruder on our griefs?

Enter Herakles.

HERAKLES.

Ho, fellow, why this solemn brooding look?
 The servant should not lower upon the guest,
 But welcome him with kindly-beaming cheer. 775
 Thou, seeing here in presence thy lord's friend,
 With visage sour and cloud of knitted brows
 Receiv'st him, fretting o'er an alien grief.
 Hither to me, that wiser thou may'st grow.
 The lot of man—its nature knowest thou? 780
 I trow not: how shouldst thou? Give ear to me.
 From all mankind the debt of death is due,
 Nor of all mortals is there one that knows
 If through the coming morrow he shall live:
 For trackless is the way of fortune's feet, 785
 Not to be taught, nor won by art of man.
 This hearing then, and learning it from me,

Make merry, drink : the life from day to day
Account thine own, all else in fortune's power.
Honour withal the sweetest of the Gods 790
To men, the Cyprian Queen—a gracious Goddess!
These thoughts put by, and hearken to my words,
If words of wisdom unto thee they seem.
I trow it. Hence with sorrow overwrought ; [795
Pass through yon doors and quaff the wine with me,
Thy brows with garlands bound. Full well I wot,
From all this lowering spirit prison-pent
Thine anchor shall Sir Beaker's plash upheave.
What, man !—the mortal must be mortal-minded.
So, for your solemn wights of knitted brows, 800
For each and all,—if thou for judge wilt take me,—
Life is not truly life, but mere affliction.

SERVANT.

All this we know : but now are we in plight
Not meet for laughter and for revelry.

HERAKLES.

The woman dead is alien-born : grieve not 805
Exceeding much. Yet live the household's lords.

SERVANT.

Live, quotha !—know'st thou not the house's ills ?

HERAKLES.

Yea, if thy master lied not unto me.

SERVANT.

Guest-fain he is—ah, guest-fain overmuch

HERAKLES.

A stranger dead—and no guest-cheer for me ? 810

SERVANT.

O yea, an alien she—o'ermuch an alien !

HERAKLES.

Ha ! was he keeping some affliction back ?

SERVANT.

Go thou in peace : our lords' ills are for us.

HERAKLES.

Grief for a stranger such talk heralds not.

SERVANT.

Else had I not sore vexed beheld thy revelling. 815

HERAKLES.

How ! have I sorry handling of mine hosts ?

SERVANT.

Thou cam'st in hour unmeet for welcoming,
For grief is on us ; and thou see'st shorn hair
And vesture of black robes.

HERAKLES.

But who hath died ?

Not of the children one, or grey-haired sire ? 820

SERVANT.

Nay, but Admetus' wife is dead, O guest.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou?—Ha, even then ye gave me welcome?

SERVANT.

For shame he could not thrust thee from these doors.

HERAKLES.

O hapless! what a helpmeet hast thou lost!

SERVANT.

We have all perished, and not she alone. 825

HERAKLES.

I felt it, when I saw his tear-drowned eyes,
His shaven hair, and face: yet he prevailed,
Saying he bare a stranger-friend to burial.
I passed this threshold in mine heart's despite,
And drank in halls of him that loves the guest, 830
When thus his plight!—And am I revelling
With head wreath-decked?—That thou should'st ne'er
have told,
When such affliction lay upon the home!
Where doth he bury her? Where shall I find her?

SERVANT.

By the straight path that leads Larissa-wards 835
Shalt see the hewn-stone tomb without the walls.

HERAKLES.

O much-enduring heart and soul of mine,
Now show what son the Lady of Tiryns bare,
Elektryon's child Alkmênê, unto Zeus.

For I must save the woman newly dead, ✓ 840
 And set Alcestis in this house again,
 And render to Admetus good for good.
 I go. The sable-vestured King of Corpses,
 Death, will I watch for, and shall find, I trow,
 Drinking the death-draught hard beside the tomb. 845
 And if I lie in wait, and dart from ambush,
 And seize, and with mine arms' coil compass him,
 None is there shall deliver from mine hands
 His straining sides, or e'er he yield his prey.
 Yea, though I miss the quarry, and he come not 850
 Unto the blood-clot, to the sunless homes
 Down will I fare of Korê and her king,
 And make demand. I doubt not I shall lead
 Alcestis up, and give to mine host's hands,
 Who to his halls received, nor drave me thence, 855
 Albeit smitten with affliction sore,
 But hid it, like a prince, respecting me.
 Who is more guest-fain of Thessalians?
 Who in all Hellas?—O, he shall not say
 That one so princely showed a base man kindness. 860
[Exit.]

*Enter Admetus, with Chorus and Attendants, returning
from the funeral.*

ADMETUS.

O hateful returning!
 O hateful to see
 Drear halls full of yearning
 For the lost—ah me!
 What aim or what rest have I?—silence or speech, of
 what help shall they be?

Would God I were dead !
O, I came from the womb
To a destiny dread !
Ah, those in the tomb—
How I envy them ! How I desire them, and long to
abide in their home !

To mine eyes nothing sweet
Is the light of the heaven,
Nor the earth to my feet ;
Such a helpmeet is riven 870
By Death from my side, and my darling to Hades the
spoiler hath given.

CHORUS.

Pass on thou, and hide thee
In thy chambers.

ADMETUS.

Ah woe !

CHORUS.

Wail the griefs that betide thee :
How canst thou but so ?

ADMETUS.

O God !

CHORUS.

Thou hast passed through deep waters of
anguish—I know it, I know.

ADMETUS.

Alas and alas !

CHORUS.

No help bringeth this
To thy love in that place.

ADMETUS.

Woe !

CHORUS.

Bitter it is
The face of a wife well-belovèd for ever and ever to
miss.

ADMETUS.

Thou hast stricken mine heart
Where the wound will not heal.
What is worse than to part
From the loving and leal? 880
Would God I had wedded her not, home-bliss with
Alcestis to feel !

O, I envy the lot
Of the man without wife,
Without child : single-wrought
Is the strand of his life :
No soul-crushing burden of sorrow, no strength-over-
mastering strife.

But that children should sicken,
That gloom of despair
Over bride-beds should thicken,
What spirit can bear
When childless, unwedded, a man through life's calm
journey might fare ?

CHORUS.

Thee Fortune hath met,
Strong wrestler, and thrown ;
Yet no bounds hast thou set— 890

ADMETUS.

Woe's me !—

CHORUS.

To thy moan.
O, thy burden is heavy !

ADMETUS.

Alas !

CHORUS.

Yet endure it : thou art not alone.
Not thou art the first
Of bereaved ones.

ADMETUS.

Ah me !

CHORUS.

Such tempest hath burst
Upon many ere thee.
Unto each his mischance, when the surges roll up from
Calamity's sea.

ADMETUS.

O long grief and pain
For belovèd ones passed !

Why didst thou restrain
When myself I had cast
Down into her grave, with the noblest to lie peace-
lulled at the last ?

Not one soul, but two 900
Had been Hades' prey,
Souls utterly true
Together for aye,
Which together o'er waves of the underworld mere had
passed this day.

CHORUS.

Of my kin was there one,
And the life's light failed
In his halls of a son,
One meet to be wailed,
His only belovèd : howbeit the manhood within him
prevailed ;

And the ills heaven-sent
As a man did he bear,
Though by this was he bent
Unto silvered hair,
Far on in life's path, without son for his remnant of
weakness to care. 910

ADMETUS.

O, how can I tread
Thy threshold, fair home ?
How shelter mine head
'Neath thy roof, now the doom
Of the Gods' dice changeth ?—ah me, what change
upon all things is come !

For with torches aflame
Of the Pelian pine,
And with bride-song I came
In that hour divine,
Upbearing the hand of a wife—thine hand, O darling
mine !

Followed revellers, raising
Acclaim : ever broke
From the lips of them praising,
Of the dead as they spoke,
And of me, how the noble, the children of kings, Love
joined 'neath his yoke. 920

But for bridal song
Is the wail for the dead,
And, for white-robed throng,
Black vesture hath led
Me to halls where the ghost of delight lieth couched on
a desolate bed.

CHORUS.

To the trance of thy bliss
Sudden anguish was brought.
Never lesson like this
To thine heart had been taught :
Yet thy life hast thou won, and thy soul hast delivered
from death :—is it nought ?

Thy wife hath departed :
Love tender and true 930
Hath she left :—stricken-hearted,
Wherein is this new ?
Hath Death not unyoked from the chariot of Love full
many ere you ?

ADMETUS.

riends, I account the fortune of my wife ✓ 935
 happier than mine, albeit it seems not so.
 or nought of grief shall touch her any more,
 and glorious rest she finds from many toils.
 ut I, unmeet to live, my doom outrun, ✓
shall drag out bitter days: I know it now. 940
 How shall I bear to enter this mine home?
 speaking to whom, and having speech of whom,
 shall I find joy of entering?—whither turn me?
 the solitude within shall drive me forth,
 Whenso I see my wife's couch tenantless, 945
 and seats whereon she sat, and, 'neath the roof,
 All foul the floor; when on my knees my babes
 calling shall weep their mother, servants moan
 the peerless mistress from the mansion lost.
 All this within: but from the world without 950
 shall bridals of Thessalians chase me: throngs
 Where women gossip; for I shall not bear
 In those companions of my wife to look.
 And, if a foe I have, thus shall he scoff:
 Lo there who basely liveth—dared not die, 955
 But whom he wedded gave, a coward's ransom,
 And 'scaped from Hades. Count ye him a man?
 He hates his parents, though himself was loth
 To die!" Such ill report, besides my griefs,
 shall mine be. Ah, what profit is to live, 960
 In friends, in evil fame, in evil plight?

CHORUS.

✕ (Str' I)

I have mused on the words of the wise,
 Of the mighty in song;
 I have lifted mine heart to the skies,

✓ I have searched all truth with mine eyes ;
 But nought more strong
Than Fate have I found : there is nought
 In the tablets of Thrace,
 Neither drugs whereof Orpheus taught,
 Nor in all that Apollo brought 97
 To Asklepius' race,
 When the herbs of healing he severed, and out of their
 anguish delivered
 L The pain-distraught.

(Ant. 1

There is none other Goddess beside,
 To the altars of whom
 No man draweth near, nor hath cried
 To her image, nor victim hath died,
 Averting her doom.
 O Goddess, more mighty for ill
 Come not upon me
 Than in days overpast : for his will
 Even Zeus may in no wise fulfil
 Unholpen of thee.
 Steel is molten as water before thee, but never relenting
 came o'er thee, 98
 Who art ruthless still.

(Str. 2

Thee, friend, hath the Goddess gripped : from her
 hands never wrestler hath slipped.
 Yet be strong to endure : never mourning shall bring
 our beloved returning
 From the nethergloom up to the light.
 Yea, the heroes of Gods begotten,
 They fade into darkness, forgotten
 In death's chill night. 99

Dear was she in days ere we lost her,
 Dear yet, though she lie with the dead.
 None nobler shall Earth-mother foster
 Than the wife of thy bed.

(*Ant.* 2)

Not as mounds of the dead which have died, so account
 we the tomb of thy bride,
 But O, let the worship and honour that we render to
 Gods rest upon her :

Unto her let the wayfarer pray.
 As he treadeth the pathway that trendeth 1000
 Aside from the highway, and bendeth
 At her shrine, he shall say :
 " Her life for her lord's was given ;
 With the Blest now abides she on high.
 Hail, Queen, show us grace from thine
 heaven ! "

Even so shall they cry.

But lo, Alkmênê's son, as seemeth, yonder,
 Admetus, to thine hearth is journeying.

Enter Herakles, leading a woman wholly veiled.

HERAKLES.

Unto a friend behoveth speech outspoken,
 Admetus, not to hide within the breast
 Murmurs unvoiced. I came mid thine affliction. 1010
 Fair claim was mine to rank amidst thy friends. ✓
 Thou told'st me not how lay thy wife a corpse :
 Thou gavest me guest-welcome in thine home,
 Making pretence of mourning for a stranger.
 I wreathed mine head, I spilled unto the Gods 1015
 Drink-offerings in a stricken house, even thine.

I blame thee, thus mishandled, yea, I blame thee.
Yet nowise is my will to gall thy grief.
But wherefore hither turning back I come,
This will I tell. Take, guard for me this maid, 102
Till, leading hitherward the Thracian mares,
I come from slaughter of Bistonia's lord.
But if—not that, for I would fain return,—
I give her then, for service of thine halls.
Prize of hard toil unto mine hands she came : 102
For certain men I found but now arraying
An athlete-strife, toil-worthy, for all comers,
Whence I have won and bring this victor's meed.
Horses there were for them to take which won
The light foot's triumph ; but for hero-strife, 103
Boxing and wrestling, oxen were the guerdon :
A woman made it richer. Shame it seemed
To hap thereon, and slip this glorious gain.
But, as I said, this woman be thy care : [103
For no thief's prize, but toil-achieved, I bring her.
Yea, one day thou perchance shalt say 'twas well.

ADMETUS.

Not flouting thee, nor counting among foes,
My wife's unhappy fate I hid from thee.
But this had been but grief uppled on grief,
Hadst thou sped hence to be another's guest ; 104
And mine own ills sufficed me to bewail.
But, for the woman—if in any wise
It may be, prince, bid some Thessalian guard her,
I pray thee, who hath suffered not as I.
In Pheræ many a friend and host thou hast.
Awaken not remembrance of my grief. 104
I could not, seeing her mine halls within,

Be tearless : add not hurt unto mine hurt.
 Burdened enough am I by mine affliction.
 Nay, in mine house where should a young maid lodge ?—
 For vesture and adorning speak her young :— 1050
 What, 'neath the men's roof shall her lodging be ?
 And how unsullied, dwelling with young men ?
 Not easy is it, Herakles, to curb
 The young : herein do I take thought for thee.
 Or shall I ope to her my dead wife's bower ? 1055
 How !—cause her to usurp my lost love's bed ?
 Twofold reproach I dread—from mine own folk,
 Lest one should say that, traitor to her kindness,
 I fall upon another woman's bed,—
 And of the dead, to me most reverence-worthy, 1060
 Needs must I take great heed. But, woman, thou,
 Whoso thou art, know that thy body's stature
 Is as Alcestis, and thy form as hers.
 Ah me !—lead, for the Gods' sake, from my sight
 This woman !—Take not my captivity captive. 1065
 For, as I look on her, methinks I see
 My wife : she stirs mine heart with turmoil : fountains
 Of tears burst from mine eyes. O wretched I !
 Now first I taste this grief's full bitterness.

CHORUS.

In sooth thy fortune can I not commend : 1070
 Yet must we brook a God's gift, whoso cometh.

HERAKLES.

O that such might I had as back to bring
 To light thy wife from nethergloom abodes,
 And to bestow this kindness upon thee !

ADMETUS.

Fain would'st thou, well I know. But wherefore this?
It cannot be the dead to light should come. [1075

HERAKLES.

O'ershoot not now the mark, but bear all bravely.

ADMETUS.

Easier to exhort than suffer and be strong.

HERAKLES.

But what thy profit, though for aye thou moan?

ADMETUS.

I too know this; yet love constraineth me. 1080

HERAKLES.

Love for the lost—ay, that draws forth the tear.

ADMETUS.

She hath undone me more than words can tell.

HERAKLES.

A good wife hast thou lost, who shall gainsay?

ADMETUS.

So that this man hath no more joy in life.

HERAKLES.

Time shall bring healing: now is thy grief young. 1085

ADMETUS.

Time—time?—O yea, if this thy Time be Death!

HERAKLES.

A wife, and yearning for new love, shall calm thee.

ADMETUS.

Hush!—what say'st thou?—I could not think thereon!

HERAKLES.

How?—wilt not wed, but widowed keep thy couch?

ADMETUS.

Lives not the woman that shall couch with me. 1090

HERAKLES.

Look'st thou that this shall profit aught the dead?

ADMETUS.

I needs must honour her where'er she be.

HERAKLES.

Good—good—yet one with folly so might charge thee.

ADMETUS.

So be it, so thou call me bridegroom never.

HERAKLES.

I praise thee for that leal thou art to her. 1095

ADMETUS.

Death be my meed, if I betray her dead.

HERAKLES.

Receive this woman now these halls within.

ADMETUS.

Nay!—I beseech by Zeus that did beget thee!

HERAKLES. .

Yet shalt thou err if thou do not this thing.

ADMETUS.

Yet shall mine heart be grief-stung, if I do it. 1100

HERAKLES.

Yield thou : this grace may prove perchance a duty.

ADMETUS.

O that in strife thou ne'er hadst won this maid !

HERAKLES.

Yet thy friend's victory is surely thine.

ADMETUS.

Well said : yet let the woman hence depart.

HERAKLES.

Yea—if need be. First look well—need it be ? 1105

ADMETUS.

Needs must—save thou wilt else be wroth with me.

HERAKLES.

I too know what I do, insisting thus.

ADMETUS.

Have then thy will : thy pleasure is my pain.

HERAKLES.

Yet one day shalt thou praise me : only yield.

ADMETUS.

To Attendants.

Lead ye her, if mine halls must needs receive. 1110

HERAKLES.

Not to thy servants' hands will I commit her.

ADMETUS.

Thou lead her in then, if it seems thee good.

HERAKLES.

Nay, but in thine hands will I place her—thine.

ADMETUS.

I will not touch her!—Open stand my doors.

HERAKLES.

Unto thy right hand only trust I her. 1115

ADMETUS.

O king, thou forcest me : I will not this !

HERAKLES.

Be strong : stretch forth thine hand and touch thy
guest.

ADMETUS.

I stretch it forth, as to a headless Gorgon.

HERAKLES.

Hast her ?

ADMETUS.

I have.

HERAKLES.

Yea, guard her. Thou shalt call
The child of Zeus one day a noble guest. 1120

[*Raises the veil, and discloses Alcestis.*

Look on her, if in aught she seems to thee
Like to thy wife. Step forth from grief to bliss.

ADMETUS.

What shall I say?—Gods! Marvel this unhopèd for!
My wife do I behold in very sooth,
Or doth some god-sent mockery-joy distract me? 1125

HERAKLES.

Not so; but this thou seest is thy wife.

ADMETUS.

What if this be some phantom from the shades?

HERAKLES.

No ghost-upraiser hast thou ta'en for guest.

ADMETUS.

How?—whom I buried do I see—my wife?

HERAKLES. 1130

Doubt not: yet might'st thou well mistrust thy fortune.

ADMETUS.

As wife, as living, may I touch, address her?

HERAKLES.

Speak to her: all thou didst desire thou hast.

ADMETUS.

O face, O form of my beloved wife,
Past hope I have thee, who ne'er thought to see thee !

HERAKLES.

Thou hast : may no God of thy bliss be jealous. 1135

ADMETUS.

O scion nobly-born of Zeus most high,
Blessings on thee ! The Father who begat thee
Keep thee ! Thou only hast restored my fortunes.
How didst thou bring her from the shades to light ?

HERAKLES.

I closed in conflict with the Lord of Spirits. 1140

ADMETUS.

Where, say'st thou, didst thou fight this fight with
Death ?

HERAKLES.

From ambush by the tomb mine hands ensnared him.

ADMETUS.

Now wherefore speechless standeth thus my wife ?

HERAKLES.

'Tis not vouchsafed thee yet to hear her voice,
Ere to the Powers beneath the earth she be 1145
Unconsecrated, and the third day come. ✓
But lead her in, and, just man as thou art,
Henceforth, Admetus, reverence still the guest.
Farewell. But I must go, and work the work
Set by the king, the son of Sthenelus. 1150

MEDEA.

THE ARGUMENT.

WHEN the Heroes, who sailed in the ship *Argo* to bring home the *Golden Fleece*, came to the land of *Kolchis*, they found that to win that treasure was a deed passing the might of mortal man, so terribly was it guarded by monsters magical, even fire-breathing bulls and an un-sleeping dragon. But *Aphrodité* caused *Medea* the sorceress, daughter of *Aiêtes* the king of the land, to love *Jason* their captain, so that by her magic he overcame the bulls and the dragon. Then *Jason* took the *Fleece*, and *Medea* withal, for that he had pledged him to wed her in the land of *Greece*. But as they fled, *Absyrtus* her brother pursued them with a host of war, yet by *Medea's* devising was he slain. So they came to the land of *Iolkos*, and to *Pelias*, who held the kingdom which was *Jason's* of right. But *Medea* by her magic wrought upon *Pelias's* daughters so that they slew their father. Yet by reason of men's horror of the deed might not *Jason* and *Medea* abide in the land, and they came to *Corinth*. But there all men rejoiced for the coming of a hero so mighty in war and a lady renowned for wisdom unearthly, for that *Medea* was grandchild of the *Sun*-

god. But after ten years, Kreon the king of the land spake to Jason, saying, "Lo, I will give thee my daughter to wife, and thou shalt reign after me, if thou wilt put away thy wife Medea; but her and her two sons will I banish from the land." So Jason consented And of this befell things strange and awful, which are told herein.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

NURSE OF MEDEA'S CHILDREN.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN*

MEDEA.

CHORUS OF CORINTHIAN LADIES.

KREON, *King of Corinth.*

JASON.

AIGEUS, *King of Athens.*

MESSENGER.

CHILDREN OF MEDEA.

The Scene is in front of Jason's House at Corinth.

* *Pædagogus*.—A trusted servant, responsible for keeping the boy out of harm's way: he was present at their sports, accompanied them to and from school, and never let them be out of his sight. A similar institution is familiar to Englishmen resident in India.

MEDEA.

Enter Nurse of Medea's Children.

NURSE.

WOULD God that Argo's hull had never flown
Through those blue Clashing Rocks to Kolchis-land,
Nor that in Pelion's glens had fallen ever
The axe-hewn pine, nor filled with oars the hands
Of hero-princes, who at Pelias' hest 5
Quested the Golden Fleece ! My mistress then,
Medea, to Iolkos' towers had sailed not
With love for Jason thrilled through all her soul,
Nor had on Pelias' daughters wrought to slay
Their sire, nor now in this Corinthian land 10
Dwelt with her lord and children, gladdening
By this her exile them whose land received her,
Yea, and in all things serving Jason's weal,
Which is the chief salvation of the home,
When wife stands not at variance with her lord. 15
Now all is hatred : love is sickness-stricken.
For Jason, traitor to his babes and her,
My mistress, weddeth with a child of kings,
Daughter of Kreon ruler of the land.
And, slighted thus, Medea, hapless wife, 20
Cries on the oaths, invokes that mightiest pledge

Of the right hand, and calls the Gods to witness
 From Jason what requital she receives.
 Foodless she lies, her frame to griefs resigned,
 Wasting in tears all those long weary hours 25
 Since first she knew her outraged by her lord,
 Never uplifting eye, nor turning ever
 From earth her face ; but like a rock or sea-wave
 So hearkens she to friends that counsel her ;
 Saving at whiles, when, turning her white neck, 30
 All to herself she wails her sire beloved,
 Her land, her home, forsaking which she came
 Hither with him who holds her now dishonoured.
 Now knows she, hapless, by affliction's teaching,
 How good is fatherland unforfeited. 35
 She loathes her babes, joys not beholding them.
 I fear her, lest some mischief she devise.
 Grim is her spirit, one that will not brook
 Mishandling : yea, I know her, and I dread
 Lest through her heart she thrust the whetted knife, 40
 Through the halis stealing silent to her bed,
 Or slay the king and him that weds his child,
 And get herself therefrom some worse misfortune :
 For dangerous is she : who begins a feud
 With her, not soon shall sing the triumph-song. 45
 But lo, her boys, their racing-sport put by,
 Draw near, unwitting of their mother's ills,
 For the young heart loves not to brood in grief.

Enter Children's Guardian, with boys.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

O ancient chattel of my mistress' home,
 Why at the gates thus lonely standest thou, 50
 Thyself unto thyself discoursing ills ?

How wills Medea to be left of thee ?

NURSE.

O grey attendant of the sons of Jason,
The hearts of faithful servants still are touched
By ill-betiding fortunes of their lords. 55
For I have come to such a pass of grief,
That yearning took me hitherward to come
And tell to earth and heaven my lady's fortunes.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Ceaseth not yet the hapless one from moan ?

NURSE.

Cease!—her pain scarce begun, the midst far off! 60

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Ah fool!—if one may say it of his lords—
Little she knoweth of the latest blow.

NURSE.

What is it, ancient ? Grudge not thou to tell me.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Nought : I repent me of the word that 'scaped me.

NURSE.

Nay, by thy beard, from fellow-thrall hide not— 65
Silence, if need be, will I keep thereof.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

I heard one saying—feigning not to hear,
As I drew near the marble thrones,¹ where sit
The ancients round Peirênê's hallowed fount,—

¹ So Mahaffy, adopted by Paley.

That Kreon, this land's lord, will shortly drive 70
These boys from soil Corinthian with their mother?
Howbeit, if the tale I heard be true
I know not : fain were I it were not so.

NURSE.

Will Jason brook his children suffering this,
What though he be estrangèd from their mother ? 75

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

The old ties in the race lag far behind
The new :—no friend is *he* unto this house.

NURSE.

We are undone then, if we add fresh ill
To old, ere lightened be our ship of this.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

But thou—for 'tis not season that thy lady 80
Should know—keep silence, and speak not the tale.

NURSE.

Hear, babes, what father this is unto you !
I curse him—not : he is my master still :
But to his friends he stands convict of baseness.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

What man is not ?—Hast learnt this only now, 85
That each man loves self better than his neighbour,
For just cause some, and some for greed of gain ?
So, for a bride's sake, these their father loves not.

NURSE.

Pass in, dear children, for it shall be well.
But thou, keep these apart to the uttermost : 90
Bring them not nigh their mother angry-souled.
For late I saw her glare, as glares a bull
On these, as 'twere for mischief ; nor her wrath,
I know, shall cease, until its lightning strike.
To foes may she work ill, and not to friends ! 95

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*).

O hapless I !—O miseries heaped on mine head !
Ah me ! ah me ! would God I were dead !

NURSE.

Lo, darlings, the thing that I told you !
Lo the heart of your mother astir !
And astir is her anger : withhold you 100
From her sight, come not nigh unto her.
Haste, get you within : O beware ye
Of the thoughts as a wild-beast brood,
Of the nature too ruthless to spare ye
In its desperate mood.

Pass ye within now, departing
With all speed. It is plain to discern
How a cloud of lamenting, upstarting
From its viewless beginnings, shall burn
In lightnings of fury yet fiercer.
What deeds shall be dared of that soul,
So haughty, when wrong's goads pierce her,
So hard to control ? 110

[*Exeunt Children with Guardian.*]

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*).

Woe! I have suffered, have suffered, foul wrongs that
 may waken, may waken,
 Mighty lamentings full well! O ye children accursed
 from the womb,
 Hence to destruction, ye brood of a loathed one for-
 saken, forsaken!
 Hence with your father, and perish our home in the
 blackness of doom!

NURSE.

Ah me, in the father's offences
 What part have the babes, that thine hate
 Should blast them?—forlorn innocences,
 How sorely I fear for your fate!
 Ah princes—how fearful their moods are!—
 Long ruling, unschooled to obey,— 120
 Unforgiving, unsleeping their feuds are.
 Better life's level way.

Be it mine, if in greatness I may not,
 In quiet and peace to grow old.
 Sweeter name than "The Mean" shall ye say not;
 But to taste it is sweetness untold.
 But to men never weal above measure
 Availed: on its perilous height
 The Gods in their hour of displeasure
 The heavier smite. 130

Enter Chorus of Corinthian Ladies.

CHORUS.

I have hearkened the voice of the daughter of Kolchis,
 the sound of the crying

Of the misery-stricken ; nor yet is she stilled. Now
 the tale of her tell,
 Grey woman ; for moaned through the porch from her
 chamber the wail of her sighing ;
 And I cannot, I cannot be glad while the home in
 affliction is lying,
 The house I have loved so well.

NURSE.

Home ?—home there is none : it hath vanished away :
 For my lord to a bride of the princes is thrall ; 140
 And my lady is pining the livelong day
 In her bower, and for nought that her friends' lips say
 On her heart may the dews of comfort fall.

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*).

Would God that the flame of the lightning from heaven
 descending, descending,
 Might burn through mine head !—for in living wherein
 any more is my gain ?
 Alas and alas ! Would God I might bring to an ending,
 an ending,
 The life that I loathe, and behind me might cast all
 its burden of pain !

CHORUS.

(Str.)

O Zeus, Earth, Light, did ye hear her,
 How wailleth the woe-laden breath
 Of the bride in unhappiest plight ?
 What yearning for vanished delight, 150
 O passion-distraught, should have might
 To cause thee to wish death nearer—
 The ending of all things, death ?

Make thou not for this supplication !
 If thine husband hath turned and adored
 New love, that estrangèd he is,
 O harrow thy soul not for this.
 It is Zeus that shall right thee, I wis.
 Ah, pine not in over-vexation
 Of spirit, bewailing thy lord !

MEDEA (*behind the scenes*).

O Lady of Justice, O Artemis' Majesty, see it, O see
 it— 160
 Look on the wrongs that I suffer, by oaths ever
 lasting who tied
 The soul of mine husband, that ne'er from the curse he
 might free it, nor free it
 From your vengeance !—O may I behold him a
 last, even him and his bride,
 Them, and these halls therewithal, all shattered in
 ruin, in ruin !—
 Wretches, who dare unprovoked to do to Medea
 despite !
 O father, O city, whom erst I forsook, for undoing, un
 doing,
 And for shame, when the blood of my brother I spil
 on the path of my flight !

NURSE.

Do ye hear what she saith, and uplifteth her cry
 Unto Themis and Zeus, to the Suppliant's King,
 Oath-steward of men that be born but to die ? 170
 O my lady will lay not her anger by
 Soon, making her vengeance a little thing.

CHORUS.

(Ant.)

If she would but come forth where we wait her,
If she would but give ear to the sound
Of our speech, that her spirit would learn
From its fierceness of anger to turn,
And her lust for revenge not burn !
O ne'er may my love prove traitor,
Never false to my friends be it found !

But go thou, and forth of the dwelling 180
Thy mistress hitherward lead.
Say to her that friends be we all.
O hasten, ere mischief befall
The lords of the palace-hall.
For her grief, like a tempest upswelling,
Resistless shall ruin-ward speed.

NURSE.

I will do it : but almost my spirit despaireth
To win her ; yet labour of love shall it be.
But my queen on her thralls as a mad bull glareth,
Or a lioness couched mid her whelps, whoso dareth
With speech to draw near her, so tameless is she.

He should err not, who named the old singers in
singing 190
Not cunning, but left-handed bards, for their lays
Did they frame for the mirth-tide, the festal in-bringing
Of the wine, and the feast, when the harp-strings are
ringing
To sweeten with melody life's sweet days :

But the dread doom of mortals, the anguish heart
rending—

Never minstrel by music hath breathed on then
peace,

Nor by song with his harp-notes in harmony blending
Albeit of these cometh death's dark ending

Unto many a home that is wrecked of these.

And yet were it surely a boon to bring healing

Of sorrow to mortals with song : but in vain 201

Mid the fulness of feasting ring voices clear-pealing,

And the banquet itself hath a glamour, concealing

From mortals their doom, flinging spells over pain

[*Exit Nurse*]

CHORUS.

I have heard it, the sigh-laden cry of the daughter

Of Kolchis, the woe-shrilling anguish of wailing

For the traitor to love who with false vows caught her

Who in strength of her wrongs chideth Heaven
assailing

The Oath-queen of Zeus, who with cords all-pre
vailing [211

Forth haled her, and brought her o'er star-litten water

Where the brine-mists hover o'er Pontus' Key,

Unto Hellas far over the boundless sea.

Enter Medea.

MEDEA.

Corinthian dames, I have come forth my doors

Lest ye should blame me. Many folk I know 21

Accounted haughty, some, for proud staid mien,¹

Some, stranger-shy :² and some, that softly go,

¹ *lit.* "from their looks."

² *lit.* "as being σεμνοὶ (reserved) when amongst strangers

Have gotten ill repute of indolence.
 For justice sits not in the eyes of man,
 Who, ere he hath discerned his neighbour's heart, 220
 Hates him at sight, albeit nowise wronged.
 The sojourner must learn the city's wont ;
 Nor praise I citizens-born, law to themselves,
 Mannerless churls, which flout their fellow-folk.
 But me—unlooked-for fell this blow on me, 225
 And brake mine heart. Undone I am ; have lost
 All grace of life, and long to die, my friends.
 For he that was mine all,—thou know'st it well,—¹
 My lord, of all men basest hath become.
 Surely, of creatures that have life and wit, 230
 We women are of all things wretchedest,
 Who, first, must needs, as buys the highest bidder,
 Thus buy a husband, and our body's master
 So win—for deeper depth of ill is this.
 Nay, risk is dire herein,—or shall we gain 235
 An evil lord or good ? For change is shame
 To woman, nor may she renounce her spouse.
 And, coming to new customs, habits new,
 Seer need she be, to know the thing unlearned,
 What manner of man her couch's mate shall be. 240
 But if we learn our lesson, if our lord
 Dwell with us, plunging not against the yoke,
 Happy our lot : if not—no help but death.
 For the man, when at home they fret his soul,
 Goes forth, and stays his loathing heart's disgust, 245
 Unto a friend or age-mate turning him.
 We have but one, one heart to seek for comfort.
 But we, say they, live an unperilled life

¹ Or, reading *γυνώσκειν*—"For he, to know whom rightly was mine all."

At home, while they do battle with the spear.
 Falsely they deem : twice would I under shield 21
 Stand, rather than bear childbirth peril once.
 Yet thee and me the selfsame reasons touch not.
 Thine is this city, thine a father's home ;
 Hast bliss of life and fellowship of friends.
 But I, lone, cityless, and outraged thus 22
 Of him who kidnapped me from foreign shores,
 Mother nor brother have I, kinsman none,
 For port of refuge from calamity.
 Wherefore I fain would win of thee this boon :—
 If any path be found me, or device, 23
 Whereby to avenge these wrongs upon mine husband
 On her who weds, on him who gives the bride,
 Keep silence. Woman quails at every peril,
 Faint-heart to face the fray and look on steel ;
 But when in wedlock-rights she suffers wrong, 24
 No spirit more bloodthirsty shall be found.

CHORUS.

This will I ; for 'tis just that thou, Medea,
 Requite thy lord : no marvel thou dost grieve.
 But I see Kreon, ruler of this land,
 Advancing, herald of some new decree. 25

Enter Kreon.

KREON.

Thee the black-lowering, wroth against thy lord,
 Medea, bid I forth this land to fare
 An exile, taking thy two sons with thee,
 And make no tarrying : daysman of this cause
 Am I, and homeward go I not again 26
 Ere from the land's bounds I have cast thee forth.

MEDEA.

Ah me ! undone am I in utter ruin !
My foes crowd sail pursuing : landing-place
Is none from surges of calamity.
Yet, howso wronged, one question will I ask— 280
For what cause, Kreon, dost thou banish me ?

KREON.

I fear thee—need is none to cloak my words—
Lest on my child thou wreak some ill past cure.
And to this dread do many things conspire.
Wise art thou, cunning in much evil lore ; 285
Chafed art thou, of thine husband's couch bereft :
I hear thou threatenest, so they bring me word,
To wreak on sire, on bridegroom, and on bride
Mischief. I guard mine head ere falls the blow.
Better be hated, woman, now of thee, 290
Than once relent, and sorely groan too late.

MEDEA.

Not now first, Kreon,—many a time ere now
Rumour hath wronged and wrought me grievous harm.
Ne'er should the man whose heart is sound of wit
Let teach his sons more wisdom than the herd. 295
They are burdened with unprofitable lore,
And spite and envy of other folk they earn.
For, if thou bring strange wisdom unto dullards,
Useless shalt thou be counted, and not wise :
And, grant thy name o'ertop the self-extolled 300
Wits, in the city odious shalt thou be.
Myself too in this fortune am partaker.
Of some my wisdom wins me jealousy,

Some count me idle ; some, o'erbusy ; some
Unsocial :—yet not over-wise am I. 305
And thou, thou fear'st me, lest I mar thy music.
Not such am I—O Kreon, dread not me—
That against princes I should dare transgress.
How hast thou wronged me ? Thou hast given thy
child [310
To whomso pleased thee. But—I hate mine husband :
And, doubtless, this in prudence hast thou done ?
Nay, but I grudge not thy prosperity.
Wed ye, and prosper. But in this your land
Still let me dwell : for I, how wronged soe'er,
Will hold my peace, o'er mastered by the strong. 315

KREON.

Soft words to hear : but lurks mine heart within
Dread lest thou plottest mischief all the while ;
And all the less I trust thee than before.
The vehement-hearted woman—yea, or man—
Is easier watched-for than the silent-cunning. 320
But forth with all speed : plead me pleadings none.
For this is stablished : no device hast thou
To bide with us, who art a foe to me.

MEDEA.

Nay,—by thy knees, and by the bride, thy child !

KREON.

Thou wastest words ; thou never shalt prevail. 325

MEDEA.

Wilt drive me forth, respecting nought my prayers ?

KREON.

Ay: more I love not thee than mine own house.

MEDEA.

O, how I call thee now to mind, my country!

KREON.

Ay, dear to me is Corinth, next my children.

MEDEA.

Alas! to mortals what a curse is love! 330

KREON.

Blessing or curse, I trow, as fortune falls.

MEDEA.

Zeus, may the cause of this 'scape not thy ken! ✓

KREON.

Hence, passionate fool, and rid me of my trouble.

MEDEA.

Troubled am I, nor need I troubles new.

KREON.

Soon shalt thou be by servants' hands thrust out. 335

MEDEA.

Nay—nay—not this, O Kreon, I beseech thee!

KREON.

A coil thou wilt make, woman, as it seems.

MEDEA.

I will flee forth :—not this the boon I crave.

KREON.

Why restive then ?—why rid not Corinth of thee ?

MEDEA.

Suffer me yet to tarry this one day, 340
 And somewhat for our exile to take thought,
 And find my babes a refuge, since their sire
 Cares nought to make provision for his sons.
 Compassionate these : a father too art thou
 Of children : meet it is thou show these grace. 345
 Not for myself I fret, if I be banished :
 For them in their calamity I mourn.

KREON.

My spirit least of all is tyrannous.
 Many a plan have my relentings marred :
 And, woman, now I know I err herein, 350
 Yet shalt thou win this boon. But I forewarn thee,
 If thee the approaching Sun-god's torch behold
 Within this country's confines with thy sons,
 Thou diest :—the word is said that shall not lie.
 Now, if remain thou must, remain one day— 355
 Too short for thee to do the deeds I dread. [*Exit.*]

CHORUS.

O hapless thou !

Woe's me for thy misery, woe for the trouble and
 anguish that meet thee !

Whitherward wilt thou turn thee ?—what welcoming
 hand mid the strangers shall greet thee ?

What home or what land to receive thee, deliverance
from evils to give thee, 360.

Wilt thou find for thee now?

How mid surge of despair to o'erwhelm thee in ruin
God's hand on thine helm

Hath steered, O Medea, thy prow!

MEDEA.

'Tis ill done every way; who shall gainsay?

Yet nowise ill in this: deem not so yet. 365

Bridegroom and bride grim conflicts yet await;

Nor troubles light abide these marriage-makers.

Think'st thou that I had cringed to yon man ever,

Except to gain some gain, or work some wile? [370

Nor word nor touch of hand had I vouchsafed him.

But to such height of folly hath he come,

That, when he might forestall mine every plot

By banishment, this day of grace he grants me

To stay, wherein three foes will I lay dead,

The father, and the daughter, and mine husband. 375

And, having for them many paths of death,

Which first to take in hand I know not, friends;

Whether to set the bridal bower aflame,

Or through the heart to thrust the whetted knife,

Through yon halls stealing silent to their couch. 380

Yet one thing bars the way—if I be found

Crossing the threshold of the house and plotting,

Die shall I, and make mirth unto my foes.

Best the straight path, wherein my nature's cunning

Excels, by poisons to destroy them:—yea. 385

Now, grant them dead: what city will receive me,

What host vouchsafe a land of refuge, home

Secure, and from the avenger shield my life?

There is none. Tarrying then a little space,
 If any tower of safety shall appear, 390
 These deaths by guile and silence will I compass;
 But if misfortune drive me desperate forth,
 Myself will grip the sword,—yea, though I die,—
 And slay, and dare the strong hand's reckless deed:
 For, by the Queen of Night, whom I revere 395
 Above all, and for fellow-worker chose,
 Hekaté, dweller by mine hearth's dark shrine,
 Not one shall vex my soul, and rue it not.
 Bitter and woeful bridal will I give them,
 Bitter troth-plight and banishing of me. 400
 Up then!—spare nought of all thy sorcery-lore,
 Medea, of thy plotting and contriving;
 On to the dread deed! Now is need of daring.
 Look on thy wrongs: thou must not make derision
 For sons of Sisyphus, for Jason's bride,— 405
 Thou, sprung from royal father, from the Sun!
 Thou know'st means. Yea, our woman-nature 'tis—
 Say they—to be most helpless for all good,
 But fashioners most cunning of all ill.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1.)

Upward aback to their fountains the sacred rivers are
 stealing;
 Justice is turned to injustice, the order of old to con-
 fusion: 410
 The thoughts of the hearts of men are treachery wholly,
 and, reeling
 From its ancient foundations, the faith of the Gods
 is become a delusion.
 Changes—and changes!—the voice of the people shall
 crown me with honour:

My life shall be sunlit with glory; for woman the
old-time story
Is ended, the slanders hoary no more shall as chains
be upon her.

(*Ant.* 1.)

And the strains of the singers of old generations for
shame shall falter, 420
Which sang evermore of the treason of woman, her
faithlessness ever.

Alas, that our lips are not touched with the fire of song
from the altar

Of Phœbus, the Harper-king, of the inspiration-
giver!

Else had I lifted my voice in challenge of song high-
ringing

Unto men: for the roll of the ages shall find for the
poet-sages

Proud woman-themes for their pages, heroines worthy
their singing.

(*Str.* 2.)

But thou from the ancient home didst sail over leagues
of foam, 430

On-spied by a frenzied heart, and the sea-gates sawest
dispart,

The Twin Rocks. Now, in the land
Of the stranger, thy doom is to waken
To a widowed couch, and forsaken
Of thy lord, and woe-overtaken,
To be cast forth shamed and banned.

(*Ant.* 2.)

Disannulled is the spell of the oath: no shame for the
broken troth

In Hellas the wide doth remain, but heavenward its
flight hath it ta'en.

No home of a father hast thou 440
 For thine haven when trouble-storms lower.
 Usurped is thy bridal bower
 Of another, in pride of her power,
 Ill-starred, overqueening thee now.

Enter Jason.

JASON.

Not now first, nay, but ofttimes have I marked
 What desperate mischief is a froward spirit.
 For in this land, this home, when thou might'st stay
 Bearing unfractiously thy rulers' pleasure,
 Banished thou art for wild and whirling words. 450
 Me they vex not—cease never, an thou wilt,
 Clamouring, "Jason is of men most base!"
 But, for thy words against thy rulers spoken,
 Count it all gain—mere exile punishing thee.
 For me—still strove I to appease the wrath 455
 Of kings incensed: fain would I thou shouldst stay.
 But thou rein'st not thy folly, speaking still
 Evil of dignities; art therefore banished.
 Yet, for all this, not wearied of my friends,
 With so much forethought come I for thee, lady, 460
 That, banished with thy babes, thou lack not gold,
 Nor aught beside. Full many an ill is brought
 In exile's train. Yea, though thou hatest me,
 Ne'er can I harbour evil thought of thee.

MEDEA.

Caitiff of caitiffs!—blackest of reproaches 465
 My tongue for thine unmanliness can frame—
 Thou com'st to me—thou com'st, most hateful proved
 To heaven, to me, to all the race of men!

This is not daring, no, nor courage this, [470
 To wrong thy friends, and blench not from their eyes,
 But, of all plagues infecting men, the worst,
 Even shamelessness. And yet 'tis well thou cam'st,
 For I shall ease the burden of mine heart

Reviling thee, and thou be galled to hear.

And with the first things first will I begin. 475

I saved thee, as they know, what Greeks soe'er
 Entered with thee the self-same Argo's hull,
 Thee, sent to quell the flame-outbreathing bulls
 With yoke-bands, and to sow the tilth of death.

The dragon, warder of the Fleece of Gold, 480

That sleepless kept it with his manifold coils,
 I slew, and raised deliverance-light for thee.

Myself forsook my father and mine home,

And to Iolkos under Pelion came

With thee, more zealous in thy cause than wise, 485

And Pelias slew by his own children's hands—

Of all deaths worst,—so cast out all thy¹ fear.

And thus of me, basest of men, entreated,

For a new bride hast thou forsaken me,

Though I had born thee children. Wert thou child-
 less, 490

Not past forgiving were this marriage-craving.

But faith of oaths hath vanished. I know not

Whether thou deem'st the olden Gods yet rule,

Or that new laws are now ordained for men ;

For thine heart speaks thee unto me forsworn. 495

Out on this right hand, which thou oft wouldst clasp,—

These knees!—how vainly have we been embraced

By a base man, thus frustrate of our hopes !

¹ Or "Yea, cast out all their fear."

Come, as a friend will I commune with thee—
 Yet what fair dealing should I hope from thee?— 500
 Yet will I : questioned, baser shalt thou show.
 Now, whither turn I?—to my father's house,
 Which, with my country, I for thee cast off?
 To Pelias' hapless daughters?—Graciously
 Their father's slayer would they welcome home! 505
 For thus it is: a foe am I become
 To mine own house. Whom I should ne'er have
 harmed,
 For grace to thee I made mine enemies.
 So then midst Hellas' daughters hast thou made me
 Blest in return for all: in thee have I— 510
 O wretched I!—a wondrous spouse and leal,¹
 If from the land cast forth I pass to exile
 Forlorn of friends, alone with children lone.
 A proud reproach for our new bridegroom this—
 In poverty thy babes, thy saviour, wander! 515
 O Zeus, ah wherefore hast thou given to men
 Plain signs for gold which is but counterfeit,
 But no assay-mark nature-graven shows
 On man's form, to discern the base withal?

CHORUS.

✓ Awful is wrath, and past all balm of healing, 520
 When they that once loved clash in feud of hate.

JASON.

Needs must I be not ill at speech, meseems,
 But, like the careful helmsman of a ship,
 With close-reefed canvas run before the gale,

¹ Or, reading *καπιστον*, "Woe's me!—a marvellous spouse beyond belief,"

Woman, of thy tempestuous-railing tongue. 525
 I—for thy kindness tower-high thou pilest—
 Deem Kypri saviour of my voyaging,
 Her, and none other or of Gods or men.
 A subtle wit thou hast—what need to force me
 To tell the tale how Love, by strong compulsion 530
 Of shafts unerring, made thee save my life ?
 Yet take I not account too strict thereof ;
 For, in that thou didst save me, thou didst well.
 Howbeit, more hast thou received than given
 Of this my safety, as my words shall prove :— 535
 First, then, in Hellas dwell'st thou, in the stead
 Of land barbaric, knowest justice, learnest
 To live by law without respect of force.
 And all the Greeks have heard thy wisdom's fame.
Renown is thine : but if on earth's far bourn 540
 Thou dwelledst yet, thou hadst not lived in story.
 Now mine be neither gold mine halls within,
 Nor sweeter song be mine than Orpheus sang,
 If my fair fortune be to fame unknown.
 Thus far of my great labours have I spoken,— 545
 Since thou flung'st down this challenge to dispute :—
 But, for thy railings on my royal marriage,
 Herein will I show, first, that wise I was ;
 Then, temperate ; third, to thee the best of friends
 And to my children—nay, but hear me out. 550
 When I came hither from Iolkos-land
 With many a desperate fortune in my train,
 What happier treasure-trove could I have found
 Than to wed—I, an exile—with a princess ?
 Not—where it galls thee—loathing couch of thine, 555
 And for a new bride smitten with desire,
 Nor eager I to multiply mine offspring ;—

Suffice these born to me : no fault in them :—
 But that we might with honour live—grave import,—
 And be not straitened,—for I know full well 560
 How all friends from the poor man stand aloof,—
 And I might nurture as beseems mine house
 Our sons, and to these born of thee beget
 Brethren, and, knitting in one family all, [565
 Live happy days. Thou, what wouldst thou of children?
 But me it profits, through sons to be born
 To help the living. Have I planned so ill ?
 ✓ Not thou wouldst say it, but the lost couch galls thee.
 But ye—ye women—so unreasoning are
 That, wedlock-rights unmarred, ye count all well ; 570
 But to the couch if aught untoward hap,
 With the best, fairest lot are ye at feud
 Most bitter. Would that mortals otherwise
 Could get them babes, that womankind were not,
 And so no curse had lighted upon men. 575

CHORUS.

A Words, Jason, words, tricked out full cunningly :
 Yet to me—though I speak not to thy mind—
 Unjust thou seem'st, betraying thus thy wife.

MEDEA.

Of many things I think not as think many.
 For in my sight the villain subtle-tongued 580
 Getteth himself for gain exceeding loss,
 Who, confident his tongue can gloze the wrong,
 Becomes a bold knave :—no great wisdom this.
 So be not thou, as touching me, fair-seeming [585
 And crafty-tongued : one word shall overthrow thee :

Thou shouldest, if not base, have wed this bride
With my consent, not hid it from thy friends. ✓✓

JASON.

Ay, nobly hadst thou helped in this my purpose,
Had I a marriage named, who even now
Canst not refrain thy heart's exceeding wrath ! 590

MEDEA.

Not this thine hindrance, but the alien wife
No crown of honour was as eld drew on.

JASON.

Now know this well—not for the woman's sake
I wed the royal bride whom I have won,
But, as I said, of my desire to save 595
Thee, and beget seed royal, to my sons
Brethren, and for mine house a tower of strength.

MEDEA.

No prosperous life 'neath sorrow's cloud for me, ✓
Nor weal, with thorns of conscience in mine heart !

JASON.

Know'st how to change thy prayer, and show the wiser ?
May thy good never seem to thee thy sorrow ; [600
Nor in fair fortune deem thy lot misfortune.

MEDEA.

O yea, insult !—Thou hast a refuge, thou ;
But desolate I am banished from this land.

JASON.

Thyself hast chosen this : none other blame. 605

MEDEA.

I?—sooth, by wedding and betraying thee!

JASON.

By cursing princes with an impious curse.

MEDEA.

Even so,—and thus am cursing now *thine* house?

JASON.

With thee no more I wrangle touching this.

But if, or for the children or thyself, 610

For help in exile thou wilt take my gold,

Speak: ready am I to give with hand ungrudging,

And send guest-tokens which shall find thee friends.

If this thou wilt not, foolish shalt thou be:

Refrain wrath, and advantaged shalt thou be. 615

MEDEA.

Thy friends!—nothing will I of friends of thine.

No whit will I receive, nor offer thou.

No profit is there in a villain's gifts.

JASON.

In any wise I call the Gods to witness

That all help would I give thee and thy sons; 620

But thy good likes thee not: thy stubborn pride

Spurns friends: the more thy grief shall therefore be.

MEDEA.

Away!—impatience for the bride new-trapped

Consumes thee while thou loiterest at the doors! [625

Wed: for perchance—and God shall speed the word—

Thine shall be bridal thou wouldst fain renounce.

[Exit Jason.]

CHORUS.

(Str. 1.)

Love bringeth nor glory nor honour to men when it
cometh restraining

Not its unscanted excess : but if Kypris, in measure
raining 630

Her joy, cometh down, there is none other Goddess
so winsome as she.

Not upon me, O Queen, do thou aim from thy bow all-
golden

The arrow desire-envenomed that none may avoid—
not on me !

(Ant. 1.)

But let Temperance shield¹ me, the fairest of gifts of
the Gods ever-living :

Nor ever with passion of jarring contention, nor feuds
unforgiving,

In her terrors may Love's Queen visit me, smiting
with maddened unrest

For a couch mismated my soul : but the peace of the
bride-bed be holden 640

In honour of her, and her keen eyes choose for us
bonds that be best.

(Str. 2.)

O fatherland, O mine home,

Not mine be the exile's doom !

Into poverty's pathways hard to be trod may my feet
not be guided !

Most piteous anguish were this.

By death—O by death ere then may the conflict of life
be decided,

¹ στέγαι (Verrall), *vice* MSS. στέργοι, "befriend."

Ended be life's little day ! To be thus from the home-
land divided— 650

No pang more bitter there is.

(*Ant.* 2).

We have seen, and it needeth nought

That of others herein we be taught :

For thee not a city, for thee not a friend hath com-
passionated

When affliction most awful is thine.

But he, who regardeth not friends, accursed may he
perish, and hated, 660

Who opes not his heart with sincerity's key to the
hapless-fated—

Never such shall be friend of mine !

Enter Aigeus.

AIGEUS.

Medea, hail !—for fairer greeting-word
None knoweth to accost his friends withal.

MEDEA.

All hail thou also, wise Pandion's son, 665
Aigeus. Whence art thou journeying through this
land ?

AIGEUS.

Leaving the ancient oracle of Phœbus.

MEDEA.

Why didst thou fare to earth's prophetic navel ?

AIGEUS.

To ask how seed of children might be mine.

MEDEA.

'Fore Heaven !—aye childless is thy life till now ? 670

AIGEUS.

Childless I am, by chance of some God's will.

MEDEA.

This, with a wife, or knowing not the couch ?

AIGEUS.

Nay, not unyoked to wedlock's bed am I.

MEDEA.

Now what to thee spake Phœbus touching issue ?

AIGEUS.

Deep words of wisdom not for man to interpret. 675

MEDEA.

Without sin might I know the God's reply ?

AIGEUS.

O yea—good sooth, it needs the wise heart most.

MEDEA.

What said he ? Say, if sin be not to hear.

AIGEUS.

The wine-skin's prominent foot I should not loose. ✓

MEDEA.

[680

Till thou shouldst do what thing, or reach what land ?

AIGEUS.

Till to the hearth ancestral back I came.

MEDEA.

And thou, what wouldst thou sailing to this shore ?

AIGEUS.

There is one Pittheus, king of Trœzen he,—

MEDEA.

A man most pious, Pelops' son, they say.

AIGEUS.

To him the God's response I fain would tell. 685

MEDEA.

Yea—a wise man, and having skill herein.

AIGEUS.

Yea, and my best-belovèd spear-ally.

MEDEA.

Now prosper thou, and win thine heart's desire.

AIGEUS.

Why droops thine eye ?—why this wan-wasted hue ?

MEDEA.

Aigeus, of all men basest is mine husband. 690

AIGEUS.

What say'st thou ? Clearly tell me thine heart's pain.

MEDEA.

He wrongs me—Jason, nothing wronged of me.

AIGEUS.

What hath he done ? More plainly tell it out.

MEDEA.

Another wife he takes, his household's mistress.

AIGEUS.

Ha ! hath he dared in truth this basest deed ? 695

MEDEA.

Yea : I am now dishonoured, once beloved.

AIGEUS.

Another love was this ?—or hate of thee ?

MEDEA.

Love ?—yea, of the highest :—traitor he to love !

AIGEUS.

Away with him, if he be base as this !

MEDEA.

His love was for affinity with princes. 700

AIGEUS.

Who giveth him his daughter ? End the tale.

MEDEA.

Kreon, who ruleth this Corinthian land.

AIGEUS.

Sooth, lady, reason was that thou shouldst grieve.

MEDEA.

'Tis death to me ! Yea, also am I banished.

AIGEUS.

Of whom ? A new ill this thou namest is.¹ 705

MEDEA.

Kreon from Corinth driveth me an exile.

AIGEUS.

Doth Jason suffer this ?—I praise it not.

MEDEA.

In pretence, no : but to stand firm—not he !
 But I beseech thee, touching this thy beard,
 Clasp thy knees, and so become thy suppliant ;—
 Pity, O pity me the evil-starred, [710
 And see me not cast forth to homelessness :
 Receive to a hearth-place in thy land and homes.
 So by heaven's blessing fruitful be thy love
 In children, and in death thyself be blest. 715
 Thou know'st not what good fortune thou hast found :
 For I will end thy childlessness, will cause
 Thy seed to grow to sons ; such drugs I know.

AIGEUS.

For many causes am I minded, lady,
 This grace to grant thee : for the Gods' sake first ; 720
 Then, for the seed of children thou dost promise ;

¹ Or "Another's crime thou namest now," reading *ἄλλου* *vice* *ἄλλο* (Verrall).

For herein wholly extinct is Aigeus' name. X
 But thus it is—if to my land thou come,
 I thy defence essay, in bounds of justice.
 Howbeit of this do I forewarn thee, lady, 725
 From this land will I not consent to lead thee.
 But, if thou reachest of thyself mine homes,
 Safe shalt thou bide : to no man will I yield thee. X
 But from this land thou must thyself escape ;
 For blameless will I be to allies too. 730

MEDEA.

So be it. Yet, were oath-pledge given for this
 To me, then had I all I would of thee.

AIGEUS.

Ha, dost not trust me ?—Or at what dost stumble ?

MEDEA.

I trust thee : but my foes are Pelias' house [735
 And Kreon. Oath-bound, thou couldst never yield me
 To these, when they would drag me from the land.
 Hadst thou but promised, to the Gods unpledged,¹
 Thou mightest turn their friend, might'st lightly yield
 To herald-summons. Strengthless is my cause :
 Wealth is on their side, and a princely house. 740

AIGEUS.

Foresight exceeding, lady, in thy words !²
 Yet, if this be thy will, I draw not back ;

¹ Reading *ἀνώματος* (737) and *τάχ'* (739)

² v.l. *προθυμίαν* : " Much eagerness to help thy words imply ! " (ironical).

Since for myself is this the safest course,
To have a plea to show unto thy foes ;
And surer is thy part. The Oath-gods name. 745

MEDEA.

Swear by Earth's plain, and by my father's father
The Sun, and join the Gods' whole race thereto.

AIGEUS.

That I will do or not do—what ? Say on.

MEDEA.

That from thy land thyself wilt never cast me,
Nor, if a foe of mine would hale me thence, 750
Wilt, while thou liv'st, consenting yield me up.

AIGEUS.

By Earth, the Sun's pure majesty, and all
The Gods, I swear to abide by this thou hast said.

MEDEA.

Enough. For broken troth what penalty ?

AIGEUS.

Whatso befalleth God-despising men. 755

MEDEA.

Pass on thy way rejoicing : all is well.
I too will come with all speed to thy burg,
When mine intent is wrought, my wish attained.
[Exit Aigeus.]

If she receive and don mine ornaments,
 Die shall she wretchedly, and all who touch her,
 With drugs so dread will I anoint my gifts.
 Howbeit here I pass this story by, 790
 And wail the deed that yet for me remains
 To bring to pass; for I will slay my children,
 Yea, mine: no man shall pluck them from mine hand.
 Then, having brought all Jason's house to wrack,
 I leave the land, fleeing my dear babes' blood, 795
 And having dared a deed most impious.
 For unendurable are mocks of foes.
 Let all go: what is life to me? Nor country
 Nor home have I, nor refuge from mine ills.
 Then erred I, in the day when I forsook 800
 My father's halls, by yon Greek's words beguiled,
 Who with God's help shall render me requital.
 For never living shall he see hereafter
 The sons I bare him, nor shall he beget
 Of his new bride a son, for doomed is she, 805
 Wretch, to die wretchedly by drugs of mine.
 Let none account me impotent, nor weak,
 Nor meek of spirit!—Nay, in other sort,
 Grim to my foes, and kindly to my friends,
 For of such is the life most glorious. 810

CHORUS.

Since thou hast made me partner of this tale,—
 Wishing to help thee, championing withal
 The laws of men, I say, do thou not this.

MEDEA.

It cannot be but so: yet reason is
 That thou say this, who art not wronged as I. 815

CHORUS.

Woman, wilt have the heart to slay thy sons ?

MEDEA.

Yea : so mine husband's heart shall most be wrung.

CHORUS.

But thou of wives most wretched shouldst become.

MEDEA.

So be it : wasted are all hindering words. [820

But ho ! [*to the Nurse*] go thou and Jason bring to me—

Thou whom I use for every deed of trust.

And look thou tell none aught of mine intent,

If thine is loyal service, thou a woman.

[*Exit Medea and Nurse.*

CHORUS.

(*Str. 1*)

O happy the race in the ages olden

Of Erechtheus, the seed of the blest Gods' line,

In a land unravaged, peace-enfolden,

Aye quaffing of Wisdom's glorious wine,

Ever through air clear-shining brightly 830

As on wings uplifted pacing lightly,

Where they tell how Harmonia of tresses golden

Bare the Pierid Muses, the stainless Nine.

(*Ant. 1*)

And the streams of Cephisus the lovely-flowing

They tell how the Lady of Cyprus drew,

And in Zephyr-wafts of the winds sweet-blowing

Breathed far over the land their dew.

And she sendeth her Loves which, throned in glory

By Wisdom, fashion all virtue's story, 840
Over her tresses throwing, throwing,
Roses in odorous wreaths aye new.

Re-enter Medea. (Str. 2)

How then should the hallowed city,
The city of sacred waters,
Which shields with her guardian hand
All friends that would fare through her land,
Receive a murderess banned,
Who had slaughtered her babes without pity,
A pollution amidst of her daughters? 850

In thine heart's thoughts set it before thee—
To murder the fruit of thy womb!
O think what it meaneth to slay
Thy sons—what a deed this day
Thou wouldst do!—By thy knees we pray,
By heaven and earth we implore thee,
Deal not to thy babes such a doom!

(Ant. 2)

O whence, and O whence wilt thou gain thee
Such desperate hardihood
That for spirit so fiendish shall serve,
That shall strengthen thine heart, that shall nerve
Thine hand, that it shall not swerve
From the ruthless deed that shall stain thee
With horror of children's blood?

O how, when thine eyes thou art turning 860
On thy little ones, wilt thou refrain
The motherhood in thee, to feel
No upwelling of tears?—Canst thou steel
Thy breast when thy children kneel,
To crimson thine hand, with unyearning
Heart for thy darlings slain?

Enter Jason.

JASON.

Summoned I come : for, though thou be my foe,
This grace thou shalt not miss ; but I will hear
What new thing, lady, thou dost wish of me.

MEDEA.

Jason, I ask thee to forgive the words
Late-spoken, and to bear with that my mood : 870
Well mayst thou, for remembrance of old loves.
Now have I called myself to account, and railed
Upon myself—"Wretch, wherefore am I mad?
And wherefore rage against good counsellors,
And am at feud with rulers of the land, 875
And with my lord, who works my veriest good,
Wedding a royal house, to raise up brethren
Unto my sons? Shall I not cease from wrath?
What aileth me, when the Gods proffer boons?
Have I not children? Know I not that we 880
Are exiles from our own land, lacking friends?"
Thus musing, was I ware that I had nursed
Folly exceeding, anger without cause.
Now then I praise thee ; wise thou seem'st to me
In gaining us this kinship, senseless I, 885
Who in these counsels should have been thine ally,
Have furthered all, have decked the bridal couch,
And joyed to minister unto the bride.
But we are—women : needs not harsher word.
Yet evil shouldst thou not for evil render, 890
Nor pit against my folly folly of thine.
I yield, confessing mine unwisdom then,
But unto better counsels now am come.
Children, my children, hither : leave the house ;

[*Enter Children.*

Come forth, salute your father, and with me 895
 Bid him farewell : be reconciled to friends
 Ye, with your mother, from the hate o'erpast.
 Truce is between us, rancour hath given place.
 Clasp ye his right hand.—Woe for ambushed ills !
 I am haunted by the shadow of hidden things ! 900
 Ah children, will ye thus, through many a year
 Living, still reach him loving arms ? Ah me,
 How swift to weep am I, how full of fear !
 Feuds with your father ended—ah, so late !—
 Have filled with tears these soft-relenting eyes. 905

CHORUS.

And from mine eyes start tears of pale dismay.
 Ah may no evil worse than this befall !

JASON.

Lady, I praise this mood, yet blame not that :
 'Tis nothing strange that womankind should rage
 When the spouse trafficketh in alien marriage. 910
 But now to better thoughts thine heart hath turned,
 And thou, though late, upon the victor side
 Hast voted : a wise woman's deed is this.
 And for you, children, not unheedfully
 Your sire hath ta'en much forethought, so help heaven.
 For ye, I ween, in this Corinthian land [915
 Shall with your brethren stand the foremost yet.
 Grow ye in strength : the rest shall by your sire,
 And whatso God is gracious, be wrought out.
 You may I see to goodly stature grown, 920
 In manhood's prime, triumphant o'er my foes.
 Thou, why bedew'st thou with wan tears thine eyes,

Turning aback from them thy pallid cheek,
And dost not hear with gladness this my speech?

MEDEA.

'Tis nought: but o'er these children broods mine
heart. 925

JASON.

Fear not: all will I order well for them.

MEDEA.

This will I:—'Tis not I mistrust thy words;
But woman is but woman—born for tears.

JASON.

Why, hapless one, dost make moan over these?

MEDEA.

I bare them. When thou prayedst life for them, 930
Pity stole o'er me, whispering, "Shall this be?"
But that for which thou cam'st to speech of me
In part is said; to speak the rest is mine:—¹
Since the king pleaseth forth the land to send me,
For me too this is best,—I know it well,— 935
That I bide not, a stumblingblock to thee
And the land's lords, whose house's foe I seem,
So fare I forth to exile from this land.
But, that my sons by thine hand may be reared,
Entreat thou Kreon that they be not banished. 940

¹ Verrall here says "There is no apparent reason for the emphatic pronoun," (ἐγώ). Is it not that the object of the interview was twofold, first, to ask Jason's pardon,—that had now been spoken by him,—secondly, to introduce a proposal of her own, involving independent action on her part?

JASON.

Prevail I may not, yet must I essay.

MEDEA.

Nay then, thy bride bid thou to pray her sire
That thy sons be not banished from this land.

JASON.

Yea surely ; and, I trow, her shall I win,
If of her sister women she is one. 945

MEDEA.

I too will bear a part in thine endeavour ;
For I will send her gifts unmatched for beauty
Of all that men see now, I know, by far,
A robe fine-spun, a golden diadem ;
Our sons to bear them. Now must an attendant 950
With all speed hither bring the ornaments.
Blessings shall hers be, not one, but untold,
Who winneth thee for lord, a peerless spouse,
Who owneth ornaments which once the Sun,
My father's father, gave unto his offspring ! 955
Take in your hands, my sons, these bridal gifts,
And to the happy princess-bride bear ye
And give : with gifts shall she be satisfied.

JASON.

But, fond one, why make void thine hands of these ?
Deem'st thou a royal house hath lack of robes, 960
Or gold, deem'st thou ? Keep these and give them not.
For, if my wife esteems me aught, my wish
Will she prefer to treasures, well I wot.

MEDEA.

Nay, speak not so : gifts sway the Gods, they say.
 Gold weigheth more with men than words untold. 965
 Hers fortune is ; God favoureth now her cause ;
 Young is her power. Life would I give for ransom
 Of my sons' banishment, not gold alone.
 Now, children, enter ye the halls of wealth.
 Unto your sire's new wife, my lady-queen, 970
 Make supplication, pray ye be not exiled,
 Giving mine ornaments. Most importeth this,
 That she into her hands receive my gifts.
 Haste ye, and to your mother bring glad tidings
 Of good success in that she longs to win. 975

[*Exeunt Jason and Children.*]

CHORUS.

(*Str. 1*)

Now for the life of the children mine hope hath been
 turned to despairing.
 No hope any more ! On the slaughterward path even
 now are they faring !
 The bride shall receive it, the diadem-garland that
 beareth enfolden
 Doom for the hapless mid glittering sheen :
 And to set the adorning of Hades about her tresses
 golden 980
 She shall take it her hands between.

(*Ant. 1*)

For its glamour of beauty, its splendour unearthly,
 shall swiftly persuade her
 To bedeck her with robe and with gold-wrought crown :
 she shall soon have arrayed her

In attire as a bride in the presence of phantoms from
Hades uprisen ;

In such dread gin shall her feet be ta'en :
In the weird of death shall the hapless be whelmed
and from Doom's dark prison

Shall she steal forth never again.

(*Str.* 2

And thou, wretch, bridegroom accurst, who art fain to
a princely alliance, 99

Blasting thou bringest—unknowing, un-
thinking!—

Of life on thy sons, and thy bride shall to foul death
plight her affiance.

How far from thy fortune of old art thou
sinking!

(*Ant.* 2

And amidst my lamentings I mourn for thine anguish
O hapless mother

Of children, who makest thee ready to
slaughter

Thy babes, to avenge thee on him who would lawlessly
wed with another, 100

Would forsake thee to dwell with a prince's
daughter.

Enter Children's Guardian, with Children.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Mistress, remission for thy sons of exile!
Thy gift the princess-bride with joy received
In hand ; and there is peace unto thy sons.

MEDEA.

Alas !

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Why dost thou stand confounded mid good hap ? 1005
Now wherefore turnest thou thy face away,
And dost not hear with gladness this my speech ?

MEDEA.

Woe's me !

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

This cry is to the tidings not attuned.

MEDEA.

Woe yet again !

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Can I have brought ill hap
Unwitting—erred in deeming these glad tidings ? 1010

MEDEA.

As they are, are thy tidings : thee I blame not.

• CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Why down-drooped is thine eye ? Why flow thy
tears ?

MEDEA.

Needs must they, ancient ; for these things the Gods
And I withal—O fool !—have ill contrived.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Fear not : thy children yet shall bring thee home. 1015

MEDEA.

Others ere then shall wretched I send home.

CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN.

Not thou alone art severed from thy sons.
Submissively must mortals bear mischance.

MEDEA.

This will I : but within the house go thou,
And for my children's daily needs prepare. 1020

[Exit Children's Guardian.]

O children, children, yours a city is,
And yours a home, where, leaving wretched me,
Dwell shall ye, of your mother aye bereft.

I shall go exiled to another land,
Ere I have joyed in you, have seen your bliss, 1025

Ere I have decked for you the couch, the bride,
The bridal bower, and held the torch on high.

O me accurst in this my ruthless mood !

For nought, for nought, my babes, I nurtured you,
And all for nought I laboured, travail-worn, 1030
Bearing sharp anguish in your hour of birth.

Ah for the hopes—unhappy !—all mine hopes
Of ministering hands about mine age,

Of dying folded round with loving arms,
All men's desire ! But now—'tis past—'tis past, 1035

That sweet imagining ! Forlorn of you

A bitter life and woeful shall I waste.

Your mother never more with loving eyes
Shall ye behold, passed to another life. [1040

Woe ! woe ! why gaze your eyes on me, my darlings ?

Why smile to me the latest smile of all ?

Alas ! what shall I do ?—Mine heart is failing

As I behold my children's laughing eyes !

Women, I cannot ! farewell, purposes

O'erpast ! I take my children from the land. 1045
What need to wring the father's heart with ills
Of these, to gain myself ills twice so many ?
Not I, not I !—Ye purposes, farewell !
Yet—yet—what ails me ? Would I earn derision,
Letting my foes slip from mine hand unpunished ? 1050
I must dare this. Out on my coward mood
That from mine heart let loose relenting words !
Children, pass ye within. [*Exeunt Children.*

Now, whoso may not
Sinless be present at my sacrifice,
On his head be it : mine hand faltereth not. 1055
Oh ! oh !
O heart, mine heart, do not—do not this deed !
Let them be, wretched heart, spare thou thy babes !
There dwelling with me shall they gladden thee.—
No !—by the nether fiends that dwell with Hades,
Never shall this betide, that I will leave 1060
My children for my foes to trample on.
They needs must die. And, since it needs must be,
Even I will slay them, I, who gave them life.
All this is utter doom :—she shall not 'scape !
Yea, on her head the wreath is ; in my robes 1065
The princess-bride is perishing—I know it.
But—for I fare on journey most unhappy,
And shall speed these on yet unhappier—
I would speak to my sons. [*Re-enter Children.*

Give, O my babes,
Give to your mother the right hand to kiss. 1070
O dearest hand, O lips most dear to me,
O form and noble feature of my children,
Blessing be on you—*there* !—for all things here
Your sire hath reft. O sweet, O sweet embrace !

O children's roseleaf skin, O balmy breath ! 1075
Away, away ! Strength faileth me to gaze
On you, but I am overcome of evil.

[*Exeunt Children.*]

Now, now, I learn what horrors I intend :
But passion overmastereth sober thought :
And this is cause of direst ills to men. 1080

CHORUS.

I

Full oft ere this my soul hath scaled
Lone heights of thought, empyrean steeps,
Or plunged far down the darkling deeps,
Where woman's feebler heart hath failed.

Yet wherefore failed ? Should woman find
No inspiration thrill her breast,
Nor welcome ever that sweet guest
Of Song, that uttereth Wisdom's mind ?

Alas ! not all ! Few, few are they,—
Perchance amid a thousand one
Thou shouldest find,—for whom the sun
Of poesy makes an inner day.

II

Now this I say—calm bliss, that ne'er 1090
Knew love's wild fever of the blood,
The pains, the joys, of motherhood,
Passeth all parents' joy-blent care.

The childless, they that never prove
If sunshine comes, or cloud, to men
With babes, far lie beyond their ken
The toils, the griefs, of parent-love.

But they whose halls with laughter sweet
 Of children ring—I mark them aye
 Care-fretted, travailing alway 1100
 To win their loved ones nurture meet.

III

One toils with love more strong than death :
 Yet—yet—who knoweth whether he
 A wise man or a fool shall be
 To whom he shall his wealth bequeath ?

But last, but worst, remains to tell :
 For though ye get you wealth enow,
 And though your sons to manhood grow,
 Fair sons and good :—if Death the fell,

To Hades vanishing, bears down 1110
 Your children's lives, what profit is
 That Heaven hath laid, with all else, this
 Upon mankind, this sorrow's crown ?

MEDEA.

Friends, long have I, abiding fortune's hap,
 Expected what from yonder shall befall.
 And lo, a man I see of Jason's train
 Hitherward coming, and my eager heart
 Foretelleth him the herald of new ills. 1120

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

O thou who hast wrought an awful deed and lawless,
 Flee, O Medea, flee, nor once leave thou
 The sea-wain, or the car that scours the plain.

MEDEA.

Now what hath happed that calleth for such flight ?

MESSENGER.

Dead is the princess even now, and dead 1125
Kreon her father, by thy poison-drugs.

MEDEA.

A glorious tale thou tellest : thou henceforth
Art of my benefactors and my friends.

MESSENGER.

What say'st ?—Of sound mind art thou, and not mad,
Who, hearing of the havoc of the hearth 1130
Of kings, art glad, and hast no fear for this ?

MEDEA.

O yea ; I too with words of controversy
Could answer thee :—yet be not hasty, friend,
But tell how died they : thou shouldst gladden me,
Doubly, if these most horribly have perished. 1135

MESSENGER.

When, with their father, came thy children twain,
And passed into the halls for marriage decked,
Glad were we thralls who sorrowed for thy woes.
And straightway buzzed from ear to ear the tale
Of truce to old feuds 'twixt thy lord and thee. 1140
The hand one kisseth, one the golden head
Of those thy sons : myself by joy on-drawn
Followed thy children to the women's bowers.
Now she which had our worship in thy stead,

Ere she beheld thy chariot-yoke of sons, 1145
Aye upon Jason turned her yearning gaze.
But then her veil before her eyes she cast,
And swept aback the scorn of her white neck,
Loathing thy sons' approach : but now thy lord,
To turn the maiden's wrath and spite aside, 1155
Thus spake : " Nay, be not hostile to thy friends :
Cease from thine anger, turn thine head again,
Accounting friends whomso thy spouse accounts.
Their gifts receive, and plead thou with thy sire
To pardon these their exile :—for my sake." 1155
She, when she saw the attire, could not refrain,
But yielded her lord all. And ere their father
Far from her bower with those thy sons had gone,
She took the rich-wrought robes and clad herself,
Circling her ringlets with the golden crown, 1160
And by a shining mirror ranged her tresses,
Smiling at her own phantom image there.
Then, rising from her seat, she paced adown
The halls with mincing tread of ivory feet,
Exulting in the gifts, and oftentimes 1165
Sweeping her glance from neck to ankle-hem.
But then was there a fearful sight to see.
Suddenly changed her colour : reeling back
With trembling limbs she goes ; and scarce in time
Drops on the couch to fall not on the ground. 1170
Then a grey handmaid, deeming peradventure
That frenzy was of Pan or some God sent,
Raised the prayer-cry, before she saw the foam
White-frothing from her lips, or marked how rolled
Her eyeballs, and her face's bloodless hue. 1175
Then a scream, unaccordant, long and loud,
She shrilled forth. Straight to her father's chambers one

Darted, and one unto her new-made spouse,
To tell the bride's mischance : and all the roof
Echoed with multitudinous-hurrying feet. 1180
And a swift athlete's straining limbs had won
By this the goal of the six-plethra course :
Then she from trance all speechless of closed eyes
Awoke—ah wretch !—with horrible-shrilling shriek :
For like two charging hosts her agony came :—
The golden coil about her head that lay 1185
'Gan spurt a marvellous stream of ravening fire ;
While the fine robes, the gift thy children brought,
Devoured the white flesh of the unhappy one.
Upstarting from her seat she flees, all flame, 1190
Shaking her hair, her head, this way and that,
To cast from her the crown ; but firmly fixed
The gold held fast its clasp : the fire, whene'er
She shook her locks, with doubled fury blazed.
Then misery-vanquished falls she on the floor, 1195
Past recognising, save for a father, marred.
No more was seen her eyes' imperial calm,
No more her comely features ; but the gore
Dripped from her head's crown flecked with blended
fire. [1200
The flesh-flakes from her bones, like the pine's tears,
'Neath that mysterious drug's devourings melted,—
Dread sight !—and came on all folk fear to touch
The corpse : her hideous fate had we for warning.
But, ignorant of all, her wretched sire,
Suddenly entering, falls upon her corpse, 1205
And straightway wailed and clasped the body round,
And kissed it, crying, " O my hapless child,
What God thus horribly hath thee destroyed ?
Who maketh this old sepulchre bereft

Of thee? Ah me, would I might die with thee!" 1210
 But, when from wailing and from moans he ceased,
 Fain would he have upraised his aged frame,
 Yet clave, as ivy clings to laurel boughs,
 To those fine robes: then was a ghastly wrestling:
 For, while he laboured to upraise his knee, 1215
 She strained against him: if by force he haled,
 Then from the bones he tare his agèd flesh.
 At last refrained he, and gave up the ghost,
 Ill-starred, who could no more withstand his bane.
 There lie the corpses, child by agèd sire 1220
 Clapsed;—such affliction tears, not words, must mourn.
 And of thy part no word be said by me:—
 Thyself from punishment wilt find escape.
 But man's lot now, as oft, I count a shadow,
 Nor fear to say that such as seem to be 1225
 Wise among men and cunning in speech-lore,
 Even these are chargeable with deepest folly;
For among mortals happy man is none.
In fortune's flood-tide might a man become [1230
More prosperous than his neighbour: happy?—no!
 [Exit.

CHORUS.

Meseems the God with many an ill this day
 Will compass Jason,—yea, and rightfully.
 But O the pity of thy calamity,
 Daughter of Kreon, who to Hades' halls
 Hast passed, because with thee would Jason wed! 1235

MEDEA.

Friends, my resolve is taken, with all speed
 To slay my children, and to flee this land,
 And not to linger and to yield my sons

To death by other hands more merciless. [1240
 They needs must die : and, since it needs must be,
 Even I will give them death, who gave them life.
 Up, gird thee for the fray, mine heart ! Why loiter
 To do the dread ill deeds that must be done ?
 Come, wretched hand of mine, grasp thou the sword ;
 Grasp it ; — ~~move toward life's bitter starting-post,~~ 1245
 And turn not craven : think not on thy babes,
 How dear they are, how thou didst bear them : nay,
 For this short day do thou forget thy sons,
 Thereafter mourn them. For, although thou slay,
 Yet dear they are, and I a wretched woman. 1250
[Exit Medea.]

CHORUS.

(Str.)

O Earth, O all-revealing splendour
 Of the Sun, look down on a woman accurst,
 Or ever she slake the murder-thirst
 Of a mother whose hands would smite the tender
 Fruit of her womb.
 Look down, for she sprang of thy lineage golden,
 And by terror of men is the Gods' seed holden¹
 And the shadow of doom.
 But thou, O heaven-begotten glory,
 Restrain her, refrain her : the wretched, the gory
 Erinnys by demons dogged, we implore thee, 1260
 Cast forth of the home !

(Ant.)

For nought was the childbirth-travail wasted ;
 For nought didst thou bear them, the near and
 the dear,
 O thou who hast fled through the Pass of Fear,

¹ Conjecturing *πίτνει* for MSS. *πίτνειν*.

From the dark-blue Clashing Crag who hast
hasted

Speeding thy flight !

Alas for her !—wherefore hath grim wrath stirred
her

Through depths of her soul, that ruthless murder

Her wrongs must requite ?

For stern upon mortals the vengeance falleth

For kin's blood spilt ; from the earth it calleth,

A voice from the Gods, and the slayers appalleth

On whose homes it shall light. 1270

[*Children's cries behind the scenes.*]

CHILD 1.

What shall I do ?—How flee my mother's hands ?

CHILD 2.

I know not, dearest brother. Death is here !

CHORUS.

Ah the cry !—dost thou hear it ?—the children's cry !

Wretch !—woman of cursèd destiny !

Shall I enter ?—My heart crieth, “ Rescue the children
from murder drawn nigh ! ”

CHILD 1.

Yea, for the Gods' sake, help ! Sore is our need—

CHILD 2.

For now we are hemmed in by the sword's death-toils !

CHORUS.

Wretch ! of what rock is thy breast ?—of what steel is
the heart of thee moulded,

That the babes thou hast born, with the selfsame hands
that with love have enfolded 1280

These, thou hast set thee to slay ?

Of one have I heard that laid hands on her loved ones
of old, one only,

Even Ino distraught of the Gods, when Zeus' bride
drave her, lonely

And lost, from her home to stray :

And she fell—ah wretch !—on the brink as she
stood

Of the sea-scaur : guilt of her children's blood

Dragged downwards her feet to the salt sea-flood, 1

And she died with her children twain.

What ghastlier horror remains to be wrought ?

O bride-bed of women, with anguish fraught, 1290

What scathe upon mortals ere now hast thou
brought,

What manifold bane !

Enter Jason.

JASON.

Women, which stand anear unto this roof—

Is she within the halls, she who hath wrought

Dread deeds, Medea, or in flight passed thence ? 1295

For either must she hide her 'neath the earth,

Or lift on wings her frame to heaven's far depths,

Or taste the vengeance of a royal house.

How, trusts she, having murdered the land's lords,

Scatheless herself from these halls forth to flee ? 1300

Yet not for her care I, but for my sons.
Whom she hath wronged shall recompense her wrong :
But I to save my children's life am come,
Lest to my grief the kinsmen of the dead
Avenge on them their mother's impious murder. 1305

CHORUS.

Wretch, thou know'st not what depth of woe thou hast
reached,
Jason, or thou hadst uttered not such words.

JASON.

What now ?—and is she fain to slay me too ?

CHORUS.

Thy sons are dead, slain by the mother's hand.

JASON.

Ah me !—what say'st thou ?—thou hast killed me,
woman ! 1310

CHORUS.

Thy children are no more : so think of them.

JASON.

How ?—slew them ?—Where ?—within, without, the
halls ?

CHORUS.

Open, and thou shalt see thy children's corpses.

JASON.

Shoot back the bolts with all speed, serving-men !
Unbar, that I may see this twofold woe,— 1315
The dead, and her, with slaughter to requite her.

Medea appears in mid air in a chariot drawn by dragons.

MEDEA.

Why shakest thou these doors and wouldst unbar,
Seeking thy dead and me who wrought the deed?
Cease this essay. If thou wouldst aught of me, [1320
Say what thou wilt: thine hand shall touch me never.
Such chariot hath my father's sire, the Sun,
Given me, a defence from foeman's hand.

JASON.

O thing abhorred! O woman hatefullest
To Gods, to me, to all the race of men,
Thou that couldst thrust the sword into the babes 1325
Thou bar'st, and me hast made a childless ruin!
Thus hast thou wrought, yet look'st thou on the sun
And earth, who hast dared a deed most impious?
Now ruin seize thee!—clear I see, who saw not
Then, when from halls and land barbarian 1330
To a Greek home I bare thee, utter bane,
Traitor to sire and land that nurtured thee!
Thy guilt's curse-bolt on me the Gods have launched;
For thine own brother by his hearth thou slewest
Ere thou didst enter fair-prowed Argo's hull. 1335
With such deeds thou beganst. Wedded then
To this man, and the mother of my sons,
For wedlock-right's sake hast thou murdered them.
There is no Grecian woman that had dared
This:—yet I stooped to marry thee, good sooth, 1340
Rather than these, a hateful bride and fell,
A tigress, not a woman, harbouring.

A fiercer nature than Tyrrhenian Scylla.
But—for untold revilings would not sting
Thee, in thy nature is such hardihood :— 1345
Avaunt, thou miscreant stained with thy babes' blood !
For me remains to wail my destiny,
Who of my new-wed bride shall have no joy,
And to the sons whom I begat and nurtured
Living I shall not speak—lost, lost to me ! 1350

MEDEA.

I might have lengthened out long controversy
To these thy words, if Father Zeus knew not
How I have dealt with thee and thou with me.
'Twas not for thee to set my couch at nought
And live a life of bliss, bemocking me ! 1355
Nor for thy princess, and thy marriage-kinsman,
Kreon, unscathed to banish me this land !
Wherefore a tigress call me, an thou wilt,
Or Scylla, haunter of Tyrrhenian shore ;
For thine heart have I wrung, as well behaved. 1360

JASON.

Ha, but thou sorrowest too, thou shar'st mine ills !

MEDEA.

O yea : yet grief is gain, so thou laugh not.

JASON.

O children mine, what miscreant mother had ye !

MEDEA.

O sons, destroyed by your own father's lust !

JASON.

Sooth, 'twas no hand of mine that murdered them. 1365

MEDEA.

Nay, but thine insolence and thy new-forged bonds.

JASON.

How, claim the right for wedlock's sake to slay them !

MEDEA.

A light affliction count'st thou this to woman ?

JASON.

So she be wise :—in thy sight nought were good.

MEDEA.

These live no more : this, this shall cut thine heart ! 1370

JASON.

They live—ah me !—avengers on thine head.

MEDEA.

The Gods know who began this misery.

JASON.

Yea, verily, thy spirit abhorred they know.

MEDEA.

Abhorred art thou : I loathe thy bitter tongue.

JASON.

And I thine :—yet were mutual riddance easy. 1375

MEDEA.

How then ?—what shall I do ?—fain would I this.

JASON.

Yield me my dead to bury and bewail.

MEDEA.

Never : with this hand will I bury them,
To Mountain Hêrê's precinct bearing them,
That never foe may do despite to them, 1380
Rifling their tomb. This land of Sisyphus
Will I constrain with solemn festival
And rites to atone for this unhallowed murder.
But I—I go unto Erechtheus' land,
With Aigeus to abide, Pandion's son. 1385
Thou, as is meet, foul wretch, shalt foully die,
By Argo's wreckage smitten on the skull,
Now thou hast seen this bridal's bitter ending.

JASON.

Now the Fury-avenger of children smite thee,
And Justice that looketh on murder requite thee ! 1390

MEDEA.

What God or what spirit will heed thy request,
Caitiff forsworn, who betrayest the guest ?

JASON.

Avaunt, foul thing by whose deed thy children have
died !

MEDEA.

Go hence to thine halls, thence lead to the grave thy
bride !

JASON.

I go, a father forlorn of the two sons reft from his
home ! 1395

MEDEA.

Not yet dost thou truly mourn : abide till thine old age
come.

JASON.

O children beloved above all !

MEDEA.

Of their mother beloved, not of thee.

JASON.

Yet she slew them !

MEDEA.

That thou mightest fall in the net that
thou spreadest for me.

JASON.

Woe's me ! I yearn with my lips to press
My sons' dear lips in my wretchedness. 1400

MEDEA.

Ha, now art thou calling upon them, now wouldst thou
kiss,

Who rejectedst them then ?

JASON.

For the Gods' sake grant me but this,
The sweet soft flesh of my children to feel !

MEDEA.

No—wasted in air is all thine appeal.

JASON.

O Zeus, dost thou hear it, how spurned I am?—
What outrage I suffer of yonder abhorred [1405
Child-murderess, yonder tigress-dam?
Yet out of mine helplessness, out of my shame,
I bewail my belovèd, I call to record
High heaven, I bid God witness the word, 1410
That my sons thou hast slain, and withholdest me
That mine hands may not touch them, nor bury
their clay!
Would God I had gotten them never, this day
To behold them destroyed of thee!

CHORUS.

All dooms be of Zeus in Olympus; 'tis his to reveal
them. 1415
Manifold things unhopèd-for the Gods to accomplish-
ment bring.
And the things that we looked for, the Gods deign not
to fulfil them;
And the paths undiscerned of our eyes, the Gods unseal
them.
So fell this marvellous thing.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*]

ARGUMENT.

HIPPOLYTA, *Queen of the Amazons, bore to Theseus, king of Athens and Træzen, a son whom he named from her, Hippolytus. Now this youth grew up of all men most pure in heart, reverencing chiefly Artemis the Maiden, Goddess of the chase, and utterly contemning the worship of Aphroditê. Wherefore the wrath of the Queen of Love was kindled against him, and she made Phædra, his father's young wife, mad with love for him ; and although she wrestled with her malady, and strove to hide it in her heart, till by the fever of it she was brought nigh to death's door, yet in the end it was revealed, and was made destruction to her and to Hippolytus also.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

APHRODITE (OR KYPRIS), *the Queen of Love.*

HIPPOLYTUS, *son of Theseus and Hippolyta Queen of the Amazons.*

PHÆDRA, *daughter of Minos king of Crete, and wife of Theseus.*

NURSE OF PHÆDRA.

THESEUS, *king of Athens and Træzen.*

ARTEMIS, *Goddess of Hunting.*

SERVANT OF HIPPOLYTUS.

MESSENGER, *henchman of Hippolytus.*

CHORUS, *composed of women of Træzen.*

Attendants, huntsmen, and handmaids.

SCENE :—Before the palace of Theseus at Træzen, where
Theseus dwelt, being self-exiled for a year from Athens,
to expiate the shedding of the blood of kinsmen who
had sought to dethrone him.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Enter Aphroditê.

APHRODITE.

MIGHTY on earth, and named by many a name
Am I, the Goddess Kypris, as in heaven.
And of all dwellers 'twixt the Pontic Sea
And Atlas' bourn, which look on the sun's light,
I honour them which reverence my power, 5
But bring the proud hearts that defy me low.
For even to the Gods this appertains,
That in the homage of mankind they joy.
And I will give swift proof of these my words.
For Theseus' son, born of the Amazon, 10
Hippolytus, pure-hearted Pittheus' ward,
Sole mid the folk of this Trœzenian land
Sayeth that vilest of the Gods am I ;
Rejects the couch ; of marriage will he none ;
But Phœbus' sister Artemis, Zeus' child, 15
Honours, of all Gods chiefest holding her :
And through the greenwood in the Maid's train still
With swift hounds sweeps the wild beasts from the
earth,
Linked with companionship for men too high. *he*
Yet this I grudge not : what is this to me ? 20
But that his wrong to me will I avenge

Upon Hippolytus this day : the path
 Well-nigh is cleared ; scant pains it needeth yet.
 For, as from halls of Pittheus once he sought
 Pandion's land, to see and to be sealed 25
 In the Great Mysteries, Phædra, high-born wife
 Of his own father, saw him ; and her heart
Of fierce love was enthralled by my device. X
 And, ere she came to this Trœzenian land,
 Hard by the Rock of Pallas, which looks down 30
 On this land, built she unto me a shrine
 For love of one afar ; and his memorial
 That fane divine she named for days to be.
 But since from Kekrops' land forth Theseus passed
 Fleeing the blood-guilt of the sons of Pallas, 35
 And unto this shore with his wife hath sailed,
 From his land brooking one year's banishment,
 Thenceforward, sighing and by stings of love
 Distraught, the hapless one wastes down to death
 U Silent : her malady no handmaid knows. 40
 Ah, but not so shall this love's issue fall.
 Theseus shall know this thing ; all bared shall be :
 And him that is my foe his sire shall slay
 By curses, whose fulfilment the Sea-king
 Poseidon in this boon to Theseus gave, 45
 That, to three prayers, he should ask nought in vain.
She, how high-born soe'er, yet perisheth,
Phædra :—I will not so regard her pain
That I should not exact such penalty
Of them which hate me as shall do me right. 50
 But,—forasmuch as Theseus' son I see
 Yonder draw near, forsaking hunting's toil,
 Hippolytus,—forth will I from this place.
 And a great press of henchmen following shout,

Honouring with songs the Goddess Artemis. 55
 He knows not Hades' gates wide flung for him,
 And this day's light the last his eyes shall see.

[Exit.

Enter Hippolytus and Attendant Huntsmen.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Follow on, follow on, ring out the lay
 Unto Artemis high enthroned in the sky 60
 Zeus' child, in her keeping who hath us aye.

CHORUS OF HUNTSMEN.

O Majesty, Daughter of Zeus, dread Queen,
 I hail thee, Artemis, now,
 O Leto's Daughter, O Zeus's child,
 Loveliest far of the Undeiled !
 In the Hall, "of the Mighty Father" styled,
 The palace of Zeus, mid the glory-sheen
 Of gold—there dwellest thou.
 O Fairest, to theeward in greeting I call, 70
 O fairest Artemis thou of all
 The Maidens Divine in Olympus' hall !

HIPPOLYTUS.

For thee this woven garland from a mead
 Unsullied have I twined, O Queen, and bring.
 There never shepherd dares to feed his flock, 75
 Nor steel of sickle came : only the bee
 Roveth the springtide mead undesecrate :
 And Reverence watereth it with river-dews.
 They which have heritage of self-control
 In all things,—not taught, but the pure in heart,— 80
 These there may gather flowers, but none impure.

Now Queen, dear Queen, receive this anadem
 From reverent hand to deck thy golden hair ;
 For to me sole of men this grace is given,
 That I be with thee, converse hold with thee, 85
 Hearing thy voice, yet seeing not thy face.
 And may I end life's race as I began.

SERVANT.

Prince,—for the Gods we needs must call our Lords,—
 Wouldst thou receive of me good counselling ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Yea surely : else were I fool manifest. 90

SERVANT.

✓ Knowest thou then the stablished wont of men ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Not I : whereof is this thou questionest me ?

SERVANT.

✓✓ To hate the proud reserve that owns few friends.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Rightly : what proud man is not odious ?

SERVANT.

And in the gracious is there nought of charm ? 95

HIPPOLYTUS.

Yea, much, and profit won with little pains.

SERVANT.

And deem'st thou not this same may hold with Gods ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Yea, if men live by laws derived from Gods.

SERVANT.

Why not then greet a Goddess worshipful? ✓

HIPPOLYTUS.

Whom?—have a care thy lips in no wise err.¹ 100

SERVANT.

Even Kypris, there above thy portals set.

HIPPOLYTUS.

From far I greet her, who am undefiled. ✓

SERVANT.

Worshipful is she, glorious among men.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Of Gods, of men, each maketh still his choice. ✓✓

SERVANT.

Now prosper thou;—be needful wisdom thine! 105

HIPPOLYTUS.

No God who hath night-homage pleaseth me.

SERVANT.

Guerdons of Gods, my son, ought men to use.

¹ "The Worshipful Goddesses" was the peculiar title of the Eumenides, whom it was ill-omened to name.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Depart, mine henchmen, enter ye the halls,
 And set on bread. The full board welcome is [110
 When hunting's done. And one must groom my steeds,
 That I may yoke them to the chariot-pole,
 Being full of meat, and breathe them in the race.
 But to thy Kypris wave I long farewell. [Exit.

SERVANT.

But we, who must not tread in steps of youth, [115
 Who are wise¹—so far as thralls dare claim to be,—
 Make supplication to thine images,
 Queen Kypris. It beseems thee to forgive,
 If one that bears through youth a vehement heart
 Speak folly. Be as though thou heardest not;
 For wiser Gods should be than mortal men. 120
 [Exit.

Enter Chorus of Træzenian Ladies.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

A rock there is, wherefrom, as they tell, the springs of
 the heart of the Ocean well,
 Whence the rifts of the crags overbeetling
 send
 For the plunging urns their founts outstreaming:
 Even there did I light on a maiden my friend,
 As she drenched the mantles purple-gleaming
 In the riverward-glittering spray,
 And spread the dye of the Tyrian shell on the rocks
 where glowing the sunbeams fell.
 Hers were the lips that I first heard say
 How wasteth our lady away: 130

¹ φρονούντες sc. εἶ.

(Ant. 1)

For a tale they told of a fevered bed, of the feet that
forth of her bower ne'er tread,

Of the dainty-woven veil that is cast
For a darkness over the tresses golden.

Yea, and by this hath the third day past
That the queen from her fainting lips hath with-
holden

The gift of the Lady of Corn,
Keeping her body thereof unfed, as though 'twere
pollution to taste of bread,

With anguish unuttered longing forlorn

One haven to win—death's bourn. 140

(Str. 2)

O queen, what if this be possession

Of Pan or of Hekatê?—

Of the Mother of Dindymus' Hill?—

Or the awful Corybant thrill?—

Or Dictynna hath found transgression

Of offerings unrendered in thee—

If the hand of the Huntress be here?—

For she flasheth o'er mountain and mere,

And rideth her triumph-procession

Over surges and swirls of the sea. 150

(Ant. 2)

Or thy princely lord, in whose leading

Be the hosts of Erechtheus' race,

Hath one in his halls beguiled,

That thy couch is in secret defiled?

Or hath some sea-trafficker, speeding

From Crete over watery ways

To the haven where shipmen would be,

Brought dolorous tidings to thee

That hath bowed thee with anguish exceeding
 On thy bed through thy soul's prison-days ? 160
(Epode.)

Or shall this be the discord mournful, weirdly
 haunting,

That oft-times jarreth and jangleth the strings of
 woman's being ?

'Tis the shadow of travail-throes nigh, a delirium
 spirit-daunting :

Yea, I have known it, through mine own bosom have
 felt it shiver :

But I cried to the Queen of the Bow, to the Helper in
 travail-throe for refuge fleeing ;

And by grace of the Gods she hearkeneth ever my
 fervent request, she is there to deliver. *Wait 170 the gods*

But lo, through the doors where cometh the grey-
 haired nurse

Leading the stricken one forth of her bowers :

On her brows aye darker the care-cloud lowers.

My spirit is yearning to know what is this strange
 curse,

Wherefore the queen's cheek ever is paling,
 And her strength is failing.

Enter Phædra, Nurse, and Handmaids.

NURSE.

O afflictions of mortals, O bitter pain !

What shall I do unto thee, or refrain ?

Lo here is the light of the sun, the sky :

Brought forth of the halls is thy bed ; hereby 180
 Thy cushions lie.

Hitherward wouldst thou come ; it was all thy moan :
Yet aback to thy bowers wilt thou fret to be gone.

Thou art soon disappointed, hast pleasure in nought,
Nor the present contents thee ; a thing far-sought
Thy fancy hath caught.

Better be sick than tend the sick :
Here is but one pain ; grief of mind
And toil of hands be there combined.
O'er all man's life woes gather thick ;

190

Ne'er from its travail respite is.
If better life beyond be found,
The darkness veils, clouds wrap it round ;
Therefore infatuate-fond to this

We cling—this earth's poor sunshine-gleam :

Nought know we of the life to come,

There speak no voices from the tomb :

We drift on fable's shadowy stream.

(good)

PHÆDRA.

Uplift ye my body, mine head upraise.

Friends, faint be my limbs, and unknit be their bands.

Hold, maidens, my rounded¹ arms and mine hands.

Ah, the coif on mine head all heavily weighs : [200

Take it thence till mine hair o'er my shoulders strays !

¹ Here, as in *l.* 222, her thoughts revert, with a touch of natural pathos, to the beauty, once her pride, so unavailing now. c. f. *Troilus & Cressida*, iv, 2, "Tear my bright hair," &c.

NURSE.

Take heart, my child, nor in such wild wise
Toss thou thy body so feveredly.
Lighter thy sickness to bear shall be,
If thine high-born courage in calm strength rise :
For the doom of sorrow on all men lies.

PHÆDRA.

Oh but to quaff, where the spray-veil drifteth
O'er taintless fountains, the dear cool stream ! 210
Oh to lie in the mead where the soft wind lifteth
Its tresses—'neath poplars to lie and dream !

NURSE.

My child, my child, what is this thou hast cried ?
Ah, speak not thus, with a throng at thy side,
Wild words that on wings of madness ride !

PHÆDRA.

Let me hence to the mountain afar—I will hie me
To the forest, the pines where the stag-hounds follow
Hard after the fleet dappled hinds as they fly me !
Oh, I long to cheer them with hunter's hollo,—
Ah God, were I there !—
And to grasp the Thessalian shaft steel-gleaming, 220
And to swing it on high by my hair outstreaming—
My golden hair !

NURSE.

What wouldst thou, my darling, of suchlike things ?
Will nought save the hunt and the hounds content ?
And why art thou yearning for fountain-springs ?
Lo, nigh to thy towers is a soft-sloped bent
With streams for thy drinking dew-besprent.

PHÆDRA.

Lady of Limnè, the burg looking seaward,
Of the thunder of hoofs on the wide race-courses,
Oh for the plains where the altars to theeward 230
Flame, there to be curbing the Henetan horses !

NURSE.

What speech in thy frenzy outflingest thou ?
The mountain-ward path then fain hadst thou taken
On the track of the beasts ; and thou yearnest now
For the steeds on the sea-sands wave-forsaken !
Of a surety the lore of a seer we lack
To tell what God, child, reineth thee back,
And scourgeth thy spirit from reason's track.

PHÆDRA.

O hapless I—what is this I have done ? [240
Whitherward have I wandered from wisdom's way ?
I was mad, by a God's curse overthrown.
Oh ill-starred—welladay !
Dear Nurse, veil over mine head once more ;
For I blush for the words from my lips that came.
Veil me : the tears from mine eyes down pour,
And mine eyelids sink for shame.
For anguish wakes when re-dawneth the mind.
Though a curse be madness, herein is it kind,
That the soul that it ruins it striketh blind.

NURSE.

I veil thee :—ah that death would veil 250
Me too !—with many a lesson stern
The years have brought, this too I learn—
Be links of mortal friendship frail :

Let heart-strings ne'er together cling,
Nor be indissolubly twined
The cords of love, but lightly joined
For knitting close or severing.

Ah weary burden, where one soul
Travails for twain, as mine for thee ! 260
Ruin, not bliss, say they, shall be
Care's life-absorbing heart-control.

Yea, that way sickness, madness, lies.
Therefore "the overmuch" shall be
Less than "the nought-too-much" for me :
So say I ; so shall say the wise.

CHORUS.

Thou grey-haired dame, queen Phædra's loyal nurse,
In sooth I mark her lamentable plight,
Yet what her malady, to us is dark.
Fain would we question thee and hear thereof. 270

NURSE.

I know not, though I ask : she will not tell.

CHORUS.

Nor what was the beginning of these woes ?

NURSE.

The same thy goal : nought sayeth she of all.

CHORUS.

How strengthless and how wasted is her frame !

NURSE.

No marvel, being three days foodless now. 275

CHORUS.

Madness is this, or set resolve to die ?

NURSE.

To die : she fasteth to make end of life.

CHORUS.

Strange is thy tale, if this content her lord.

NURSE.

Nay, but she hides her pain, nor owns she ails.

CHORUS.

Should he not guess ?—one glance upon her face ? 280

NURSE.

Nay, absent is he from this land of late.

CHORUS.

But thou—dost not constrain her, strive to learn
Her malady and wandering of her wit ?

NURSE.

All have I tried, and nought the more availed.
Yet will I not even now abate my zeal : 285
So stand thou by and witness unto me
How true am I to mine afflicted lords.
Come, darling child, the words said heretofore
Forget we both ; more gracious-souled be thou :

Thy lowering brow, thy wayward mood, put by. 290
 And I, wherein I erred in following thee,
 Refrain, and unto wiser counsels seek.
 If thy disease be that thou mayst not name,
 Lo women here to allay thy malady.
 But if to men thy trouble may be told, 295
 Speak, that to leeches this may be declared.
 Ha, silent?—silence, child, beseems thee not.
 Or thou shouldst chide me if I speak not well,
 Or unto pleadings wisely uttered yield.
 One word!—look hitherward!—ah, woe is me! 300
 Women, we toil and spend our strength for nought,
 And still are far as ever: of my words
 Unmelted was she then, nor hearkeneth now.
 Howbeit know thou—then be waywarder
 Than is the sea,—thy death shall but betray 305
 Thy sons, who shall not share their father's halls.
 Yea, by that chariot-queen, the Amazon,
 Who bare unto thy sons a bastard lord,—
 Not bastard-thoughted,—well thou knowest him,
 Hippolytus—

PHÆDRA.

Woe's me!

NURSE.

It stings thee, this? 310

PHÆDRA.

Thou hast undone me, nurse: by heaven, I pray,
 Speak thou the name of this man nevermore.

NURSE.

Lo there!—thy wit is sound: yet of thy wit
 Thou wilt not help thy sons nor save thy life!

PHÆDRA.

I love them : in that storm of fate I toss not. 315

NURSE.

Sure, thine are hands, my child, unstained with blood ?

PHÆDRA.

Pure be mine hands : the stain is on my soul.

NURSE.

Not, not of sorcery-spells by some foe cast ?

PHÆDRA.

A friend—unwitting he, nor wilful I.

NURSE.

Hath Theseus wrought against thee any sin ? 320

PHÆDRA.

May I be found as clear of wrong to him.

NURSE.

What then is this strange thing that deathward drives thee ?

PHÆDRA.

Let be my sin !—Not against thee I sin.

NURSE.

Of my will, never !—On thine head my failure !

[*Clings to Phædra's hands.*]

PHÆDRA.

Violence to me !—on mine hand hangest thou ? 325

NURSE.

Yea, and thy knees I never will let go.

PHÆDRA.

Thy bane, unhappy, shouldst thou hear in mine.

NURSE.

What greater bane for me than thee to lose?

PHÆDRA.

Thy death¹:—the selfsame thing shall save mine honour.

NURSE.

Still dost thou hide it, when I pray thy good? 330

PHÆDRA.

Yea, for I fashion honour out of shame.

NURSE.

If then thou tell me, more shall be thine honour.

PHÆDRA.

For God's sake hence away: let go mine hand.

NURSE.

No!—while thou grantest not the boon my due.

PHÆDRA.

I will, in reverence of thy suppliant hand. 335

¹ "A remark of little force. Why should the nurse die?" (Mahaffy and Bury.) Answered by the nurse herself, *l.* 356. Moreover, is it likely that, in the sequel, she lived, or would have been allowed to live?

NURSE.

I am dumb : henceforth thy part it is to speak.

PHÆDRA.

O hapless mother¹ !—what strange love was thine !

NURSE.

Love for the bull, my child ?—or what wouldst name ?

PHÆDRA.

And thou, sad sister, Dionysus' bride² !

NURSE.

What ails thee, child ?—dost thou revile thy kin ? 340

PHÆDRA.

And I the third—how am I misery-wrecked !

NURSE.

I am 'wildered all—whereunto tend thy words ?

PHÆDRA.

To the rock that wrecks us all, yea, from of old.

NURSE.

None the more know I that I fain would know.

PHÆDRA.

Ah, couldst thou say for me what I must say ! 345

¹ Pasiphaë, wife of Minos King of Crete, and mother of the Minotaur.

² Ariadne.

NURSE.

No seer am I to interpret hidden things.

PHÆDRA.

What mean they when they speak of this—to love?

NURSE.

The sweetest thing, my child—the bitterest too.

PHÆDRA.

For me, the second only have I proved.

NURSE.

What say'st thou?—child, dost thou love any man? 350

PHÆDRA.

Whate'er his name—'tis he—the Amazon's—

NURSE.

Hippolytus!

PHÆDRA.

✓ Thou sayest it, not I.

NURSE.

Woe, child! What wilt thou say? Thou hast dealt
me death!

Friends, 'tis past bearing. I will not endure
To live. O hateful life, loathed light to see! 355
I'll cast away, yield up, my frame, be rid
Of life by death! Farewell, I am no more.
The virtuous love—not willingly, yet love
The evil. Sure no Goddess Kypris is,
But, if it may be, something more than God, 360
Who hath ruined her, and me, and all this house.

CHORUS.

(Str. to 669-79)

Hast thou heard?—the unspeakable tale hast thou
hearkened,

The wail of my lady's anguish-throe?

O may I die, ah me! ere I know,

Dear lady, a spirit as thine so darkened. 365

O misery burdened, O whelmed in woe!

O troubles that cradle the children of men!

Undone!—all's bared to the daylight's ken.

Ah, weariful season for thee remaining! [370

Dark looms o'er the household the shadow of doom.

Plain now where the star of thy love is waning,

O hapless daughter of Crete's proud home!

PHÆDRA.

Troezenian women, ye which here abide

Upon the utmost march of Pelops' land, 375

Oft sleepless¹ in the weary-wearing night

Have I mused how the life of men is wrecked.

And not, meseems, through evil thoughts inborn

So ill they fare,—discretion dwells at least

With many,—but we thus must look hereon:—

That which is good we learn and recognise, 380

Yet practise not the lesson, some from sloth,

And some preferring pleasure in the stead

Of duty. Pleasures many of life there be—

Long gossip, idlesse,—pleasant evils sooth,—

And sense of shame—twofold: no ill the one,² 385

¹ Reading *ἀνπνος* (Nauck) *vice* *ἄλλως*, “idly.”

² Mahaffy & Bury regard this passage as corrupt, mainly on the ground that “*αἰδώς* cannot possibly be classed as a species of *ἡδονή*,” and that the description in the text of its

But one drags houses down. Were men's choice clear,
 These twain had never borne the self-same names.
 Forasmuch then as I knew this before,
 No philtre-spell was like to change mine heart
 To make me fall away from this my faith. 390
 Thee will I tell the path my reason trod ;—
 When love's wound smote me, straight I cast about
 How best to bear it : wherefore I began
 Thenceforth to hush my moan, to veil my pang.
 For the tongue none may trust, which knoweth well 395
 To lesson rebel thoughts of other men,
 Yet harboureth countless evils of its own.
 Then did I take thought nobly to endure
 My folly, triumphing by self-control.
 Lastly, when even so I nought availed 400
 To o'ermaster Love's Queen, then I deemed it best
 To die : no man shall gainsay my resolve.

two aspects is absurd. Phædra's argument is, that the only safe-guiding star is duty, from which even well-meaning persons (for she does not touch on the case of those who *wish* to sin, as having no relevance to her own position) are diverted either by disinclination for effort; or by "pleasure," either innocent but frivolous, or that equivocal pleasure which is an out-growth of the sense of shame implanted in man; for *αἰδώς* is respect for appearances, for the world's opinion; and compliance with it commonly produces a sense of satisfaction which certainly may be classed as a species of pleasure. It has been the mainspring of the world of convention and fashion in all ages. The lady who declared that "the sense of being perfectly well-dressed gives a feeling of inward tranquillity which religion is powerless to bestow," had no doubts as to the ἡδονή.

To illustrate the good aspect of *αἰδώς*, and that in which it literally "dragged a house down," we need go no further than Euripides' play of "The Suppliants," and note its effect on Adrastus, who (*l.* 160) was ashamed to withstand popular clamour, and on Theseus, who was ashamed to incur deserved reproach (342-5).

For be it mine to do not good unseen,
 Nor ill before a cloud of witnesses.
 I knew the deed, the very pang, was shame. ✓ 405
 Yea, well I knew withal myself a woman,
 The all-aborred. Foul curses upon her
 Who showed the way the first, with alien men
 To shame the couch! Ah, 'twas from princely homes
 That first this curse on womankind had birth. 410
 For, when the noble count their shame their good, ✓
 The lowly sure will hold it honourable.
 And O, I hate the continent-professed
 Which treasure secret recklessness of shame.
 How can they, O Queen Kypris, Sea-born One, 415
 Look ever in the faces of their lords,
 Nor shudder lest their dark accomplice, night,
 And their own bowers may utter forth a voice?
 Me—friends, 'tis even this dooms me to die,
 That never I be found to shame my lord, 420
 Nor the sons whom I bare; but free, with tongues
 Unfettered, flourish they, their home yon burg
 Of glorious Athens, blushing ne'er for me.
 For this cove's man, how stout of heart soe'er,
 To know a father's or a mother's sin.¹ 425
 And this alone can breast the shocks of life,
 An honest heart and good, in whomso found. ✓
 But vile ones Time unmasketh in his hour,

1 "Lines 421-425 are quite inconsistent with the last five lines of the speech, 426-430. The former speak of illegitimate birth as an unmitigated evil," &c. (Mahaffy and Bury). No—but of a father's or mother's *disgrace*, which was by no means necessarily implied in a son's illegitimate birth. Phædra is referring to a mother's conviction and punishment as an adulteress, which might well make her children (though lawfully born) hang their heads.

Holding his mirror up, as to a maid.
With such consorting ne'er may I be seen. 430

CHORUS.

Lo now, how fair is virtue everywhere,
Which yieldeth fruit of good repute mid men !

NURSE.

Mistress, thy mischance, suddenly revealed
But now, wrought in me terrible dismay.
Yet I discern my folly now. 'Tis strange 435
How second thoughts for men are wisest still.
Thine is the common lot, not past cool weighing :
The Goddess's passion-bolts have smitten thee.
Thou lov'st—what marvel this ?—thou art as many—
And lo, for love's sake wouldst fling life away ! 440
Sooth, 'twere small gain for them which love their
fellows,

Or yet shall love, if help be none save death.
For Kypris crusheth, swooping in her might ;
Yet gently stealeth she on whoso yield.
But whom she findeth wayward, arrogant-souled, 445
She graspeth, mocketh, past imagining.
Through air she roveeth, in the ocean-surge
Is Kypris ; all things have their birth of her.
'Tis she that sows love, gives increase thereof,
Whereof all we that dwell on earth are sprung. 450
Whoso have scrolls writ in the ancient days,¹
And wander still themselves by paths of song,
They know how Zeus of yore desired the embrace
Of Semelê ; they know how radiant Dawn

¹ Or, " pictures of the olden time."

Up to the Gods snatched Kephalus of yore, 455
 And all for love ; yet these in Heaven their home
 Dwell, neither do they flee the face of Gods,
 Content, I trow, in their mischance's triumph.
Thou—wilt not yield ? Thy sire by several treaty
Thee should have gotten, or with other Gods 460
 For lords, if thou wilt bow not to these laws.
 How many men, think'st thou, and wise men they,
 Knowing their beds dishonoured, shut their eyes ?
 How many a father in his son's transgression
 Playeth love's go-between ?—the maxim this 465
Of wise men, that dishonour be not seen.
 Why should men toil to over-perfect life ?
 Lo, even the house-roof's pitch the craftsman's rule
 Can make not utter-true. How thinkest thou,
 Plunged in fate's deep abyss, to swim thereout ? 470
 Tush—if more good than evil is in thee,
 Who art but human, thou shalt do full well.
 Nay, darling, from thy deadly thoughts refrain
 And from presumption—sheer presumption this, 475
That one should wish to be more strong than Gods.
 In love, flinch not ; a God hath willed this thing.
 In pain, victorious wrestle with thy pain.
 Lo, charms there be, and words of soothing spell.
 Some cure for this affliction shall appear.
 Sooth, it were long ere *men* would light thereon, 480
 Except we women find devices forth.

CHORUS.

Phædra, she speaketh words that more avail
 For this thine imminent plight : yet thee I praise.
 But haply this my praise shall gall thee more
 Than those her words, and harsher sound to thee. 485

PHÆDRA.

This is it which doth ruin goodly towns
And homes of men, these speeches over-fair.
It needeth not to speak words sweet to ears,
But those whereby a good name shall be saved.

NURSE.

Out on thine high-flown talk! No speech tricked
fair 490
Thou needest! Haste we must and learn the mind
Of this man, telling all thy tale straight out.
For, were thy life not in such desperate case,
Or thou a woman strong in self-control,
Never for thy lust's sake and pleasure I 495
To this would bring thee: but we must fight hard
Now for thy life, and void of blame is this.

PHÆDRA.

Speaker of horrors!—wilt not seal thy lips?
Wilt not refrain from utter-shameful words?

NURSE.

Shameful—yet better than the good for thee. 500
Better this deed, so it but save thy life,
Than that name, whose proud vaunt shall be thy death.

PHÆDRA.

No, by the Gods!—fair words, but words of shame!—
No farther go: I have schooled mine heart to endure
This love: but if thou plead shame's cause so fair, 505
I shall be trapped in that sin which I flee.

NURSE.

If such thy mind, thine heart should not have sinned :
But now—obey me : thank me or thank me not :—
I have within some certain charms to assuage
Love : 'twas but now they came into my thought. 510
These, not with shame, nor hurt unto thy mind,
Shall lull thy pang, so thou be not faint-hearted.
Howbeit there needs of him thou yearnest for
Some token, or a word, or fragment caught
From vesture, so to knit two loves in one. 515

PHÆDRA.

A salve, or potion, is this charm of thine ?

NURSE.

I know not : be content with help, not knowledge.

PHÆDRA.

I fear lest over-cunning thou shalt prove.

NURSE.

Then know thyself all fears. What dreadest thou ?

PHÆDRA.

Lest thou show aught of this to Theseus' son. 520

NURSE.

Let be, my child : this will I order well.
Only do thou, Queen Kypris, Sea-born One,
Work with me. Whatso else I have in mind
Shall it suffice to speak to friends within.

[Exit Nurse.]

CHORUS.

(Str. 1.)

O Eros, O Eros, how melts love's yearning
 From thine eyes, when thy sweet spell witcheth the
 heart
 Of them against whom thou hast marched in thy
 might !
 Not me, not me for mine hurt do thou smite,
 My life's heart-music to discord turning.
 For never so hotly the flame-spears dart, 530
 Nor so fleet are the star-shot arrows of light,
 As the shaft from thy fingers that speedeth its flight,
 As the flame of the Love-queen's bolts fierce-burning,
 O Eros, the child of Zeus who art !

(Ant. 1.)

O vainly, O vainly by Alpheus'¹ river
 And in Phœbus's Pythian shrine hath the land
 Of Hellas the blood of her oxen outpoured.
 But Eros, but Love, who is all men's lord,
 Unto whom Aphroditê is wont to deliver
 Her keys, that the doors be unsealed by his hand
 Of her holy of holies, we have not adored, [540
 Though he marcheth through ruin victory-ward,
 Though he raineth calamity forth of his quiver
 On mortals against his on-coming that stand.

(Str. 2.)

For I call to remembrance Oechalia's daughter,²

¹ Usually Alpheius ("In vain, O in vain by Alpheius the river"); but in this passage Euripides gives it the Doric form as above.

² Iolê, daughter of Eurytus, king of Oechalia, promised by her father to the victor in a contest of archery. Herakles proved victorious, but her father refused to fulfil his promise. Herakles thereupon sacked Oechalia, slew Eurytus' sons, and bore away his bride.

Who, ere Love 'neath his tyrannous car-yoke had
 brought her,
 Had been spouseless and free—overseas how she
 hasted,
 When Kypris the dear yoke of home had departed,
 Like a bacchanal fiend out of hell that hath darted, 550
 And with blood, and with smoke of a palace flame-
 wasted,
 And with death-shrieks for hymns at her bridal-feast
 chanted,
 By Love's Queen to the son of Alkmena was granted—
 Woe, woe for the joys of espousal she tasted !

(*Ant. 2.*)

And ye, O ye ramparts of hallowed Thêbê,
 And ye lips wave-welling of Dirkê, might ye be
 Witness how dire was the Love-queen's coming,
 When a slumber that knoweth not waking was given
 Of her spells by the flame-enfolded levin [560
 To the mother of Zeus' seed Bacchus: for dooming
 Of death had she blent with the bride-chant's singing.
 For the Dread One breatheth on all life, winging
 Softly her flight as a bee low-humming.

[*Voices within.*]

PHÆDRA.

Hush ye, O hush ye, women ! . . . Lost am I ! 565

CHORUS.

What is this dread thing, Phædra, in thine halls ?

PHÆDRA.

Peace—let me hear the voice of them within.

CHORUS.

I am dumb : an ominous prelude sure is this.

PHÆDRA.

Ah me ! ah me ! alas !

O wretched, wretched !—ah, mine agonies ! 570

CHORUS.

What cry dost thou utter ? What word dost thou shriek ?

What boding of terror hath rushed on thy soul ?—O lady, speak !

PHÆDRA.

I am undone ! O stand ye by these doors,
And hear what clamour clasheth in the house.

CHORUS.

Nay, thou art thereby, and the cry from the palace sped
forth is for thee.

O tell me what evil came forth—tell it me ! 580

PHÆDRA.

The son of the Amazon, Hippolytus,
Shouts, hurling fearful curses at mine handmaid.

CHORUS.

A noise do I hear ; yet it passeth me clearly to tell
whereby

It came—through the doors to thee came that cry.

PHÆDRA.

Ah clear—ah clear !—yea, pandar of foul sin,
Traitor to her lord's bed, he calleth her. 590

CHORUS.

Woe ! Thou art betrayed, belovèd one !
What shall I counsel ? Thy secret is bared : thou art
wholly undone.

PHÆDRA.

Woe's me ! ah woe !

CHORUS.

From the hand that loved came the traitor's blow.

PHÆDRA.

She hath undone me, telling my mischance :
In love, in shame, she sought these pangs to heal. ✓

CHORUS.

What wilt thou do, O thou in desperate plight ?

PHÆDRA.

No way save one I know—straightway to die—
The one cure for the ills that compass me. 600

Enter Hippolytus, followed by the Nurse.

HIPPOLYTUS.

O mother Earth, unveilings of the sun,
What words unutterable have I heard !

NURSE.

Hush, O my son, ere one have heard thy cry.

HIPPOLYTUS.

I have heard horrors—should I hold my peace ?

NURSE.

Yea, I beseech thee by thy fair right hand. 60

HIPPOLYTUS.

✓ Hence with thine hand !—touch not my vesture thou.

NURSE.

Oh, by thy knees, do not—ah, slay me not !

HIPPOLYTUS.

How, if thou hast said no wrong, as thou dost say ?

NURSE.

No tale is this, my son, for all men's ears.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Tush, a fair tale is fairer told to the world. 61

NURSE.

My son, thine oath !—dishonour not thine oath.

HIPPOLYTUS.

My tongue hath sworn : no oath is on my soul.

NURSE.

O son; what wilt thou do ?—wilt slay thy friends ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

Avaunt the word !—no villain is my friend.

NURSE.

Forgive, son : men are men, they needs must err. 615

HIPPOLYTUS.

Why hast thou given a home beneath the sun,
 Zeus, unto woman, specious curse to man?
 For, were thy will to raise a mortal seed,
 This ought they not of women to have gotten,
 But in thy temples should they lay its price, 620
 Or gold, or iron, or a weight of bronze,
 And so buy seed of children, every man
 After the worth of that his gift, and dwell
 Free in free homes unvexed of womankind.
 But now—soon as we go about to bring 625
 This bane to the home, we hurl to earth its weal.
 Hereby is woman proved a grievous bane—
 He, who begat and reared her, banishes,
 Yea, adds a dower, to rid him of his bane;
 While he which taketh home the noisome weed 630
 Rejoices, decks with goodly bravery
The loathly image, and tricks out with robes,—
Filching away, poor wretch! his household's wealth.
 He may not choose: who getteth noble kin
 With her, content must stomach his sour feast:— 635
 Who getteth a good wife, but worthless kin,
 Must muffle up the evil 'neath the good.
 Happiest who wins a cipher, in whose halls
 A brainless fadge¹ is throned in uselessness.
 But the keen-witted hate I: in mine house 640
Ne'er dwell one wiser than is woman's due;
For Kypris better brings to birth her mischief
 In clever women: the resourceless 'scapes

¹ "And I sall hae naething to mysel'
 But a fat fadge by the fyre."

Lord Thomas and Fair Annet.—Percy's Reliques.

That folly by the short-weight of her wit.
 Handmaids should ne'er have had access to wives, 645
But brutes, with teeth, no tongue, should dwell with
them,

That so they might not speak to any one,
 Nor win an answering word from such as these.
 But now the vile ones weave vile plots within,
 And out of doors their handmaids bear the web : 650
 As thou hast come, foul quean, to tender me
 Commerce in mine own father's sacred couch !—
 Words that with fountain-streams I'll wash away,
 Sluicing mine ears. How should I be so vile,
 Who even with hearing count myself defiled ? 655
 Woman, I fear God : know, that saveth thee.
For, had I not by oaths been trapped unwares,
I had ne'er forborne to tell this to my sire.

Now from mine home, while Theseus yet is far,
 I go, and I will keep my lips from speech. 660
 But—with my father I return, to see
 How thou wilt meet his eye, thou and thy mistress,
 And so have taste of thy full shamelessness.
 Curse ye ! My woman-hate shall ne'er be sated,
 Not though one say that this is all my theme : 665
 For they be ever strangely steeped in sin.
 Let some one now stand forth and prove them chaste,
 Or leave me free to trample on them ever. [Exit

CHORUS.

(*Ant. to 362-72.*)

O drear dark doom that on women hath lighted !
 By what cunning of pleading, when feet once trip,
 Shall we loose the accuser's iron grip ? 670

¹ *κάθαρμα λόγον* (wrestling metaphor) is the now irresistible force ("the hammerlock") of the indictment just uttered

PHÆDRA.

O earth, O sun, I am justly requited !

Through the snares of calamity how shall I slip ?
 How, friends, shall I cloke my woe, how hide ?
 What God or what man shall stand forth on my side,
 Shall consent in my sin to be made partaker ? [675

For all life's anguish, and all life's shame,
 Are upon me, and overwhelm like a shipwrecking breaker !
 Most accurst of my fate among women I am.

CHORUS.

Woe, woe ! 'Tis done. Queen, it hath nought availed,
 Thy bower-maid's device : 'tis ruin all. [680

PHÆDRA.

Vilest of vile ! destroyer of thy friends !
 How hast thou ruined me ! May Zeus my sire
 Smite thee with flame, and wholly abolish thee !
 Did I not tell thee—not divine thy purpose ?— 685
 To speak not that whereby I am now dishonoured ?
 But thou wouldst not forbear. I shall not now
 Even die unshamed ! (A pause.)

Some new plea must I find.

For yonder boy with soul keen-edged with wrath
 Shall to his sire accuse me of thy sin, 690
 Shall tell to agèd Pittheus my mischance,
 Shall blaze the shameful tale through every land.

by Hippolytus. The Chorus know in their hearts that the sweeping denunciation is unjust, but the facts of this apparently typical case seem to be dead against them; and, though they would fain enter the lists in defence of their sex, they feel that their feet have, as it were, been knocked from under them, and they are like a wrestler who is thus placed at his opponent's mercy.

Curses on thee, and whoso thrusteth in
To do base service to unwilling friends !

NURSE.

Mistress, thou may'st revile mine evil work, 695
For rankling pain bears thy discernment down :
Yet somewhat might I answer, wouldst thou hear.
I nursed thee, loved thee, sought for thy disease
A healing balm,—and found not that I would.
Had I sped well, right wise had I been held ; 700
For, as we speed, so is our wisdom's fame.

PHÆDRA.

Ha ! is this just ?—should this suffice me now,
To have stabbed me, and then close in strife of words ?

NURSE.

We waste the time in speech. I was not wise.
Yet even from this there is escape, my child. 705

PHÆDRA.

Peace to thy talk. Thy counsel heretofore
Was shame, and mischief thine endeavour was.
Hence from my sight : for thine own self take thought.
I with my needs will deal—and honourably.

[Exit Nurse.

But ye, O Trœzen's daughters nobly born, 710
Grant to my supplication this, but this—
With silence veil what things ye here have heard.

CHORUS.

I swear by reverend Artemis, Zeus' child,
Never to bare to light of thine ills aught.

PHÆDRA.

Thou hast well said. Now, as I muse, I find 715
One refuge, one, from this calamity,
So to bequeath my sons a life of honour,
And what I may from this day's ruin save.
 For never will I shame the halls of Crete,
 Nor will I meet the face of Theseus ever, 720
 For one poor life's sake, after all this shame.

CHORUS.

Ah, wilt thou do a deed of ill past cure ?

PHÆDRA.

Die will I. How—for this will I take thought. ✓

CHORUS.

Ah hush !

PHÆDRA.

O yea, advise me wisely thou.
 But I shall gladden Kypri's my destroyer 725
 By fleeing out of life on this same day,
 And vanquished so by bitter love shall be.
Yet in my death will I become the bane
Of one beside, that he may triumph not
Over my woes, and taking of my pain 730
His share, may learn sound wisdom's temperance.

[Exit Phædra.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Under the arched cliffs O were I lying,
 That there to a bird might a God change me,
 And afar mid the flocks of the winged things flying

Over the swell of the Adrian sea
 I might soar—and soar,—upon poised wings
 dreaming,
 O'er the strand where Eridanus' waters be,
 Where down to the sea-swell purple-gleaming
 The tears of the Sun-god's daughters are streaming,
 Of the thrice-sad sisters for Phaëthon sighing, 740
 Star-flashes of strange tears amber-beaming¹!
(Ant. 1)

O to win to the strand where the apples are growing
 Of the Hesperid chanters kept in ward,
 Where the path over Ocean purple-glowing
 By the Sea's Lord is to the seafarer barred!
 O to light where Atlas hath aye in his keeping
 The bourn twixt earth and the heavens bestarred,
 Where the fountains ambrosial sunward are leaping
 By the couches where Zeus in his halls lieth sleeping,
 Where the bounty of Earth the life-bestowing 750
 The bliss of the Gods ever higher is heaping!
(Str. 2)

O white-winged galley from Crete's far shore,
 Whose keel over deep-sea surges speeding,
 Through their flying brine and their battle-roar,
 Onward and onward my lady bore,
 From a bliss-fraught palace a princess leading
 To the joy of a bridal of woe exceeding!—
 For, a bird ill-boding, thy sail flitted o'er,

¹ Phaëthon, for his presumption in attempting to drive the horses of the Sun, his father, was smitten by the thunder-bolt of Zeus, and hurled to the depths of the river Eridanus (Po), where his corpse lay for ever smouldering. His sisters, mourning unceasingly beside his watery grave, were changed into poplars, and their tears, as they fell, became drops of amber.

For a curse to the Cretan land and to Athens' glorious
strand, 760

When the seafarers lashed to the beach Munychian
the hawser-band,

And sprang unto earth's firm floor.

(*Ant.* 2)

Wherefore, with love-pangs all unblest

For her gift, entered in Aphroditê, wringing

Her heart-strings asunder, a fearful guest.

Like a wrecked ship sinking, disaster-oppressed

Over her bride-bower's rafters flinging

The noose, shall she cast the coil close-clinging

Round the neck that was whitest and loveliest, 770

Because that with shuddering shame she shrank from
a loathèd name,

And she chose, for its foulness, the stainless renown of
a wife's fair fame,

And, for anguish of love, heart-rest.

[*A cry within.*]

Run to the rescue, all ye nigh the house !

In the strangling noose is Theseus' wife, our mistress !

CHORUS.

Woe ! Woe ! 'Tis done ! No more—no more is she,
The queen—in yon noose rafter-hung upcaught !

[*Cry within.*]

O haste !—will no one bring the steel two-edged, 780
Wherewith to loose this cincture of her neck ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

What shall we do, friends ? Deem ye we should pass
The doors, and from the noose-grip loose the queen ?

SEMI-CHORUS 2.

✓ Wherefore?—Are no young handmaids at her side?
 ✓ The busy meddler treadeth perilous paths. 785

[*Cry within.*]

*Uncramp the limbs, streak out the hapless corpse.
 Bitter house-warding this is for my lords!*

CHORUS.

Dead is the woeful lady, by that cry:
 Even now they streak her as a corpse is streaked.

Enter Theseus.

THESEUS.

• Women, know ye what means this cry within? 790
 A dolorous shriek of handmaids reached mine ears.
 Nor deigns the house to open doors and greet me
 Blithely, as from the oracle come home.
 ✓ Hath aught untoward happed to Pittheus' eld?
 ✓ Well-stricken in years is he, yet dole were ours 795
 If haply fare his feet from these halls forth.

CHORUS.

Not to the old pertains this thy mischance,
 Theseus: the young have died, for grief to thee.

THESEUS.

Woe!—is a child's life by the spoiler reft?

CHORUS.

✓ They live, their mother dead—alas for thee! 800

THESEUS.

What say'st thou?—dead—my wife?—by what mishap?

CHORUS.

The strangling noose she coiled about her neck.

THESEUS.

By grief's touch frozen, or of what mischance?

CHORUS.

No more I know, for to thine halls but now,
Theseus, I came, o'er these thine ills to mourn. 805

THESEUS.

Woe! with these wreathèd leaves why is mine head
Crowned—ill-starred harbinger of oracles?
Shoot back the bolts, my servants, of the doors:
Loose bars, that I may see this bitter sight,
My wife, who hath destroyed me by her death. 810

The Palace is thrown open, and the corpse of Phædra disclosed, with her handmaids grouped round it.

CHORUS.

Woe for thy misery! Woe for thine ills, who hast
suffered and wrought

Such a thing as in ruin shall overwhelm thine home!

Ah for thy desperate deed, who by violence unhallowed
hast sought

Death, who with hand despairing the all-quelling
wrestler hast caught!

Who shroudeth thy life, O hapless, in gloom?

THESEUS.

(Str.)

Ah me for my woes!—I have suffered calamity, great
Beyond all ills overpast!—O foot of fate,

How hast thou heavily trampled me and mine,

Unlooked-for blight from some avenging fiend— 820

Nay, but destruction that blasteth my life evermore!

On a sea of disaster I look, on a sea without shore,

So vast, that never can I swim thereout,

Nor ride the surge of this calamity.

What word can I speak unto thee?—how name, dear
wife,

The doom that on thee hath descended and crushed thy
life?

Like a bird hast thou fled from mine hands,

And with swift leap hast rushed to Hades' halls.

Never sorrow of sorrows was like unto mine. 830

On mine head have I gathered the load

Of the far-off sins of an ancient line;

And this is the vengeance of God.

CHORUS.

Not to thee only, king, this grief hath come;

With many more a dear wife's loss thou sharest. 835

THESEUS.

(Ant.)

In the darkness under the earth—ah me, to have died,
That in blackness of darkness under the earth I might
hide,

Who am reft of thy most dear companionship!

For thou hast dealt worse death than thou hast
suffered. [840

Of whom shall I hear whence came it, the deadly stroke

Of doom, that the heart of thee, my belovèd, broke?

Will none speak what befell?—or all for nought

Doth this my palace roof a menial throng?

Woe's me, my belovèd, stricken because of thee!

Ah for the grief of mine house, for the travail I see,

Past utterance, past endurance!—lost am I:

Mine house is desolate, motherless my babes.

O my darling, my wife, thou are gone, thou art gone,

O best upon whom the light

Looketh down of the all-beholding sun, 850

Or the splendour of star-eyed night!

CHORUS.

Woe's me for thine house! woe's me for its burden of
ill!

With ruth for thy fate running o'er do mine eyelids the
tear-drops pour:

[*Aside.*] But for woe which must follow I shudder ✓
and shudder still.

THESEUS.

Ha!

What is this tablet, what, to her dear hand
Fastened? What new thing meaneth it to tell?

Now hath she writ, unhappy one, to pray

Touching my marriage or my children aught? ✓

Fear not, lost love: the woman is not born 860

Shall lie in Theseus' couch, or tread his halls.

Lo, how the impress of the carven gold

Of her that is no more smiles up at me!

Come, let me uncoil the seal's envelopings,

And see what would this tablet say to me. 865

CHORUS.

Woe, woe ! How God bringeth evil following hard on
the track

Of evil ! I count for living unmeet
The lot of a life such as this, as on deeds that are
wrought I look back :¹

For the house of my lords standeth not any more, but
in ruin and wrack

I behold it hurled from its ancient seat. 870
Ah God, if this may be, wreck not the house,
But hearken my beseeching, for I trace,
Seer-like, an evil omen from his face.²

THESEUS.

Ah me !—a new curse added to the old,
Past utterance,³ past endurance ! Woe is me ! 875

CHORUS.

What is it ? Speak, if I may share the tale.

THESEUS.

It shrieketh,—ah, horrors the tablet outshrieketh ! O
how can I flee

My burden of woes ? I am utterly ruin-spel !

¹ Reading ἐμοί γ' ἄν οὔν, "in my opinion would the lot, etc."

² Taking τινος as referring to Theseus : c.f. Portia watching Bassanio's expression as he reads Antonio's letter. *Merch. Ven.* iii, 2.

³ λεκτόν "cannot be right, on account of the following verse" (Mahaffy and Bury). But, though the full import cannot be expressed, the bare facts (for which the chorus is asking) can.

~~They sing~~—what ^{meanful} curses they sing, the words I have ^{to}
read

Graved on the wax—woe's me ! 880

CHORUS.

Alas ! thou utterest speech that heralds ill.

THESEUS.

No more within my lips' gates will I pen
The horror that chokes utterance—ah wretch !
Hippolytus hath dared assail my bed ✓ 885
With violence, flouting Zeus's awful eye !
Father Poseidon, thou didst promise me
Three curses once. Do thou with one of these ✓
Destroy my son : may he not 'scape this day,
If soothfast curses thou hast granted me. 890

CHORUS.

O King, recall thou from the Gods this prayer ! ✓ ✓
Thou yet shall know thine error : yield to me.

THESEUS.

Never ! Yea, I will drive him from the land,
And, of two dooms, with one shall he be scourged :—
Either Poseidon, reverencing my prayers, 895
Shall slay and speed him unto Hades' halls,
Or, banished from this land, a vagabond
On strange shores, shall he drain life's bitter dregs.

CHORUS.

Lo, where thy son's self comes in season meet,
Hippolytus : refrain thy wrath, O king 900
Theseus, and for thine house the best devise.

Enter Hippolytus.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, I heard thy crying, and I came
 In haste : yet for what cause thou makest moan
 I know not, but of thee I fain would hear.
 Ha ! what is this ?—Father, thy wife I see— 905
 Dead !—matter this for marvel passing great.
 But now I left her, who upon this light
 Looked, it is not yet a long season since.
 What hath befallen her ? How perished she ?
 Father, I fain would learn it from thy mouth. 910
 Silent !—In trouble silence nought avails.
 The heart that yearns to know all cares of thine
 Fain shall be found to prove thy troubles too.
 Sure from thy friends—yea, and thy more than friends,
 Father, it is not right to hide thy griefs. 915

THESEUS.

O men that ofttimes err, and err in vain,¹
 Why are ye teaching ever arts untold,
 And search out manifold inventions still,
 But one thing know not, no, nor hunt for it,
 To teach them wit, in whom no wisdom dwells ? 920

¹ "What is the meaning of the MSS. reading, ἀμαρτάνοντες μάτην ? It does not agree with the following lines, and μάτην is superfluous" (Mahaffy and Bury). Does it not mean that, among the many blunders that men commit, without taking warning from past mistakes, is the vital one of pursuing the unessential, and neglecting the all-essential ? As to μάτην being superfluous—surely we sometimes err, yet not in vain, but, profiting by our errors, "rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things."

HIPPOLYTUS.

A cunning sophist hast thou named, of power
Them to constrain to sense who sense have none :
But—so ill-timed thy speculations are—
Father, I fear thy tongue for grief runs wild.

THESEUS.

Out ! There should dwell in men some certain test 925
Of friendship, a discerner of the heart,
To show who is true friend and who is false.
Yea, all men should have had two several voices,
One honest, one—how it might chance soe'er ;
That so the traitor voice might be convict 930
Before the honest, nor we be deceived.

HIPPOLYTUS.

How ?—to thine ear hath some friend slandered me,
That I the innocent am in evil case ?
Astonied am I, for thy words amaze me,
Thus wandering wide astray from reason's throne. 935

THESEUS.

Out on man's heart !—to what depths will it sink ?
Where shall assurance end and hardihood ?
For if it swell with every generation,
And the new age reach heights of villainy
Above the old, the Gods must needs create 940
A new earth unto this, that room be found
For the unrighteous and unjust in grain.
Look on this man, who, though he be my son,
Hath shamed my couch, and shall be manifest proved
Most vile, by testimony of the dead. 945

Hither,—since to this foulness thou hast come,—
 And set thy face against thy father's face.
 Dost thou with Gods—O thou no common man!—
 Consort? Art thou the chaste, the stainless one?
 I will not trust thy boasts, for so should I 950
 Impute to Gods unwisdom's ignorance.
 Now vaunt, ay now!—set out thy paltry wares
 Of lifeless food:¹ take Orpheus for thy king:
 Rave, worship vapourings of many a scroll:
 For ah, thou'rt caught! I warn all men to shun 955
 Such hypocrites as this; for they hunt souls
 With canting words, the while they plot foul sin.
 Dead is she: thinkest thou this saveth thee?
 Hereby thou art most convicted, basest thou!
 What oaths, what protestations shall bear down 960
 [Shows tablet
 This, for thine absolution of the charge?
 And wilt thou say, "She hated me: the bastard
 Is foe by blood of those in wedlock born?"
 Fools' traffic this in life—to fling away
 For hate of thee the dearest thing she owed! 965
 Or—say'st thou?—"Frailty is not in men,
 But in the blood of women." Youths, I have proved,
 Are no whit more than women continent
 When Kypris stirs a heart in flush of youth:
 Yet all the strength of manhood helpeth them. 970
 But wherefore thus contend against thy pleas,
 When there the corpse lies, witness faithful and true?
 Hence from this land, an exile, with all speed.
 Never come thou to god-built Athens more,
 Nor any marches where my spear hath sway: 975

¹ Abstinence from animal food was a feature of the ascetic doctrines attributed to Orpheus, as of those of Pythagoras.

For if 'neath thy mishandling I sit still,
 Never shall Isthmian Sinis testify
 That I slew him, but name it idle vaunt ;
 Nor those Skironian Rocks that skirt the sea
 Shall call me terrible to evil-doers.

980

CHORUS.

I dare not name of mortals any man
 Happy, for lo, the first is made the last.

chorus
spe
pro

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, thy rage and strong-strained fury of soul
 Are fearful : yet, fair-seeming though the charge,
 If one unfold it, all unfair it is. 985
 I have no skill to speak before a throng :
My tongue is loosed with equals, and those few. ✓
 And reason : they that are among the wise
 Of none account, to mobs are eloquent.
 Yet needs I must, now this mischance hath lighted,
 Unrein my tongue. And first will I begin [990
 Where thou didst first assail, as thou wouldst crush me,
 And I find no reply. See'st thou yon sun
 And earth ?—within their compass is no man—
 Though thou deny it—chaster-souled than I. 995
 For I have learnt, first, to revere the Gods,
 Then, to have friends which seek to do no wrong,
 Friends who think shame to proffer aught of base,
 Yea, or to render others shameful service.
 No mocker am I, father, at my friends, 1000
 But to the absent even as to the present :
 In one thing flawless,—where thou think'st me
 trapped,—
 For to this day my body is clean of lust.

per

I know this commerce not, save by the ear
 And sight of pictures,—little will have I 1005
 To look thereon, who keep a virgin soul.
 Yet, grant my virtue wins not thy belief,
 Sure 'tis for thee to show whereby I fell.
 Wilt say this woman's form in grace outshone
 All women?—that I hoped thy state to inherit 1010
 By winning for mine own thine heiress-queen?¹
 Vain fool were I—nay rather, wholly mad!²
 “Nay,” (say'st thou) “sweet is power, though one be
 chaste.”
 Nay verily!—save the lust of sovereignty
 Poison the wit of all who covet it. 1015
 Fain would I foremost victor be in games
 Hellenic, and be second in the realm,
 And with pure-hearted friends be happy still.
 For there is true well-being, peril far,
 Which giveth sweeter joys than sovereignty. 1020
 So hast thou all my counterpleas, save one:—

¹ We find a parallel suggestion in I Kings ii, 22.

² I must confess myself unable to appreciate Mahaffy and Bury's objections to the lines 1012-18, as they stand in the MSS. 1012 is, from Hippolytus' point of view, a perfect answer to 1010-11; but, remembering that it may not be to his father so self-evident as to himself, he proceeds to state and meet the former's supposed objection, taking occasion to specify what his own ambition really is. Hence it seems strange to be told that 1016-18 “are quite out of place in the mouth of Hippolytus, whose sole delight was in hunting in the woods, in the company of Artemis.” Then what did he want with a chariot and horses, and to what end did he so assiduously use them, as referred to in ll. 1111-12, 228-31, 1132-34? Doubtless he regularly hunted (on foot) before breakfast, before the dew was dried, (c.f. Xenophon, *Cynegeticus*, and Apoll. Rhod. *Argonautica* IV. 109-113), and practised for the chariot race after.

Had I a witness,—one who knows mine heart,—¹
 And made defence while she stood living there,
 By deeds shouldst thou search out and know the wicked :
 But now—by Zeus Oath-warden, by Earth's plain,
 Swear I, I ne'er attempted couch of thine, [1025
 No, nor had wished it, nor had dreamed thereof.
 God grant I perish nameless, fameless all,
 Cityless, homeless, exile, vagabond
 On earth,—may sea nor land receive my corpse 1030
 When I am dead, if I be this vile thing !
 Now if through fear she flung away her life
 I know not :—more I cannot sinless say.
 Honest she was, yet honest could not be :²
 I, caught at disadvantage, bore with wrong. 1035

CHORUS.

Thou hast said enough to turn this charge from thee
 In tendering the Gods' oath, that dread pledge.

THESEUS.

Lo, is not this a mountebank, a juggler,

¹ Or, according to the Scholiast's interpretation—"Had I a witness, upright as myself."

² There is a play on words in the Greek which seems to be rendered by the word *honest* in its twofold Shakspearean sense, first, of chastity, second, of truthfulness. In 1035, taking οὐ καλῶς with ἔχοντες, I understand him to refer to having been entrapped into a pledge of silence, and to his accepting the situation (ἐχρώμεθα), sooner than violate his oath. Retaining the ordinary punctuation, the sense of 1035 might be—

"I was not, who might have been, circumspect."
i.e. in letting myself be so entrapped.

Who thinks by his unruffled calm to outface¹
My mood, when his own father he hath shamed? 1040

HIPPOLYTUS.

Nay, but I marvel, father, at this in thee :—
For, if my son thou wert, and I thy sire,
I had slain thee : exile should not be thy mulct,
If on my wife thou hadst dared to lay a hand.

THESEUS.

Good sooth, well said : yet not so shalt thou die 1045
After the doom thou speakest for thyself ;
For easiest for the wretched is swift death.
But from the home-land exiled, wandering
To strange soil, shalt thou drain life's bitter dregs.
For this is meet wage for the impious man. 1050

HIPPOLYTUS.

Woe's me !—what wilt thou do ? Wilt not receive
Time's witness in my cause, but banish now ?

THESEUS.

Beyond the sea, beyond the Atlantic bourn,
If this I could ; so much I hate thy face.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Nor oath, nor pledge, nor prophet's utterance 1055
Wilt test, but cast me forth the land untried ?

¹ "A mountebank, a threadbare juggler . . . out-facing me." *Comedy of Errors*, V. i.

THESEUS.

This tablet, though it bear no prophet's sign,
Accuseth thee, nor lieth :—but the birds
That roam o'erhead, I wave them long farewell.¹

HIPPOLYTUS (*aside*).

O Gods, why can I not unlock my lips, 1060
Who am destroyed by you whom I revere?
No—whom I need persuade, I should not so,
And all for nought should break the oaths I swore.

THESEUS.

Faugh!—how it chokes me, this thy saintly mien!
Out from thy fatherland! Straightway begone! 1065

HIPPOLYTUS.

Unhappy! whither shall I flee?—What home
Of what friend enter, banished on such charge?

THESEUS.

Of whoso joys in welcoming for guests
Defilers of men's wives, which dwell with sin.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Alas! this stabs mine heart well-nigh to weeping, 1070
If I be published villain, thou believe it!

THESEUS.

Then shouldest thou have moaned and taken thought,
Then, when thou dar'dst insult thy father's wife.

¹ c.f. Hector's words, Iliad xii, 237-240 (where see Leaf's note), and Odyssey ii, 141-2.

HIPPOLYTUS.

O halls, could ye but find a voice for me,
And witness if I be a wicked man ! 1075

THESEUS.

To speechless witnesses thou fleest ?—Clearly
This deed, though it speak not, declares thee vile.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah, to stand face to face and see myself,
That for the wrongs I suffer I might weep !

THESEUS.

Yea, 'tis thy wont to gaze on thy perfections 1080
More than to render parents righteous honour.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah, hapless mother !—ah, my bitter birth !
Base-born be never any that I love !

THESEUS.

Will ye not hale him hence, thralls ?—heard ye not
Long since his banishment pronounced of me ? 1085

HIPPOLYTUS.

Who layeth hand on me of them shall rue !
Thou thrust me from the land if such thy mood.

THESEUS.

That will I, an thou wilt not heed mine hest.
No pity for thine exile visits me. [*Exit Theseus.*]

HIPPOLYTUS.

So then my fate is sealed. Ah, woe is me ! 1090
 I know the truth, yet know not how to tell it.
 Dearest of Gods to me, O Lëto's Child,
 Companion, fellow-huntress, I shall flee
 Athens the glorious. Farewell ye, O burg, *J. H. W.*
 Land of Erechtheus ! O Trœzenian plain, 1095
 How many pleasant paths of youth hast thou !
 Farewell : I see thee, hail thee, the last time.
 Come, O ye youths, mine age-mates in this land,
 Speak parting word : escort me from this soil :
 For never shall ye see a chaster man, *✓* *Shep.* 1100
 Albeit this my sire believeth not. [Exit.]

CHORUS.

(Str. I)

When faith overfloweth my mind, God's providence
 all-embracing¹
 Banisheth griefs : but when doubt whispereth " Ah
 but to *know* ! "
 No clue through the tangle I find of fate and of life for
 my tracing :
 There is ever a change and many a change,
 And the mutable fortune of men evermore sways to
 and fro
 Over limitless range. 1110
 (Ant. I)
 Ah, would the Gods hear prayer !—would they grant
 to me these supplications—

¹ Following Paley's interpretation. There is no more inconsistency here than in myriads of religious meditations from David downwards. The comfort of the general trust is disturbed by individual instances of the prevalence of evil. The book of Job is a monograph on this very theme.

A lot with prosperity sweet, and a soul unshadowed
of pain,
And a faith neither fixed foursquare on the flint, nor
on sandy foundations !

Quick-shifting my sail to the coming breeze
Of the morrow, so may I fleet, ever voyaging life's
wide main

Over stormless seas. 1120

(*Str.* 2)

For my mind is a fountain stirred, and I see things all
undreamed :

For the Star of Athens, that beamed
The brightest withal in Hellas-land,
We have seen him driven to an alien strand,
By the wrath of a father have seen him banned.
Ah, cityward sands, ye shall wait him in vain,
And ye mountain woods, where streamed
'Twixt the oaks the pack on the wild boar's track
In dread Dictynna's hunter-train, 1130
Till the quarry was slain.

(*Ant.* 2)

Nevermore shall he harness the Henetan horses and
leap on his car,

O'er the race-course of Limnê afar
To speed the coursers' feet of fire :
And the songs, that once 'neath the strings of
the lyre
Slept never, shall cease in the halls of his sire.
Ungarlanded Artemis' bowers shall be
In the greenwood depths that are.
By thine exile have perished the sweet hopes
cherished 1140
Of our maids, and their gentle rivalry
In love for thee.

(Epode)

For thy woeful fate shall I pass amid tears fast-flowing
A fortuneless fortune. O mother evil-starred,

This day thy birth-joy effaces!

I am wroth with the Gods:—O Graces

Aye linked in loving embraces,

Why do ye suffer that he from his land should be going,
From his home, who hath nowise earned a doom so
bitter-hard? 1150

But lo, I see Hippolytus' henchman nigh
Hasting unto the halls with clouded brows.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Where should I go and find this country's king,
Theseus, ye women? If ye know, declare
Straightway to me. Within these halls is he? 1155

CHORUS.

Lo yonder where he cometh forth the halls.

Enter Theseus.

MESSENGER.

Theseus, I bring a sorrow-kindling tale
To thee and all the citizens which dwell
In Athens and the bounds of Trœzen-land.

THESEUS.

What now?—Hath some disaster unforeseen 1160
Fallen on these two neighbour-citied states?

MESSENGER.

Hippolytus is no more, one may say,
Though yet a little space he seeth light.

THESEUS.

Of whom slain?—Hath one met him in his wrath,
Whose wife he had outraged, even as his sire's? 1165

MESSENGER.

His proper chariot-team hath dealt him death,
And thy mouth's curses, which thou didst call down
From the Sea's Lord, thy father, on thy son.

THESEUS.

O Gods! Poseidon! how thou wast indeed
My father, who hast heard my malison! 1170
How perished he? In what way did the gin
Of justice snap on him who wrought me shame?

MESSENGER.

We, hard beside the beach that greets the surf,
With combs were smoothing out his horses' manes
Weeping: for word had come to us to say 1175
That no more in this land Hippolytus
Might walk, of thee to wretched exile doomed.
Then came he, bringing the same tale of tears
To us upon the strand: a countless throng
Of friends his age-mates following with him came. 1180
But, ceasing at the last from moan, he cried:
"Why rave I thus? I must obey my sire.
Harness the horses to the chariot-yoke,
My thralls: this city is no more for me."
Then, then did every man bestir himself. 1185
Swifter than one could say it were the steeds
Harnessed, and by our lord's side set we them.
Then the reins caught he from the chariot-rail,

Settling his feet, all buskined as he was¹ ;
And to the Gods first stretched his hands and cried :
" Zeus, may I die if I a villain am ! [1190
May my sire know that he is wronging me,
When I am dead, if not while I see light ! "
Then in his hands he took the scourge² and smote
At once the steeds. We henchmen by the car 1195
Fast by the reins attended on our lord
Towards Argos straight and Epidauria.
And, as we entered on a desert tract,
Beyond this Trœzen's border lies a beach
Sloping full down to yon Saronic Sea. 1200
There from earth's womb a noise like Zeus's thunder
Made muffled roaring, a blood-curdling sound.
Then the steeds lifted head and pricked the ear ;
And thrilled through us most vehement dismay
Whence might the sound be. To the sea-lashed
shores 1205
Then glanced we, and a surge unearthly saw
Up-columned to the sky, that from my sight
Shrouded was all the beach Skironian ;
Veiled was the Isthmus and Asklepius' Crag.

¹ Better perhaps,

“ And set his feet fair in the car’s foot-rests.”

So Mahaffy and Bury, according to the apparent meaning of the Scholiast. It seems, however, rather too strong to characterize the common interpretation, that in his haste to obey, he had not removed his hunter's boots, as "so ridiculous that it scarce deserves mention,"—unless we are prepared to find something ridiculous in "With your loins girded, *and shoes on your feet*, and your staff in your hand . . . in haste."

² For the identity of κέντρον and μάστιξ, see Leaf's most valuable note on Iliad xxiii, 387.

Then swelling higher, higher, and spurting forth 1210
All round a cloud of foam and sea-blown spray,
Shoreward it rusheth toward the four-horse car.
Then from the breaker's midst and hugest surge
The wave belched forth a bull, a monster fierce,
With whose throat-thunder all the land was filled 1215
And echoed awfully, as on our gaze
He burst, a sight more dread than eyes could bear.
Straightway wild panic falleth on the steeds :
Yet their lord, wholly conversant with wont
Of horses, caught the reins in both his hands, 1220
And tugs, as shipman tugs against the oar,
Throwing his body's weight against the reins.
But on the fire-forged bits they clenched their teeth,
And whirl him on o'ermastered, recking not
Of steering hand, or curb, or strong car's weight. 1225
And if, yet holding to the chariot-helm,
Toward the smooth ground he strove to guide their
course,
Aye showed that bull in front, to turn them back,
Maddening with fright the fourfold chariot-team.
If toward the rocks they rushed with frenzied heart,
Fast by the rail in silence followed he [1230
On, till he fouled and overset the car,
Dashing against a rock the chariot felly.
Then all was turmoil : upward leapt in air
Naves of the wheels and linchpins of the axles. 1235
And he, unhappy, tangled in the reins,
Bound in indissoluble bonds, is haled
Dashing his head against the cruel rocks,
Rending his flesh, outshrieking piteous cries—
“ O stay, ye horses nurtured at my cribs, 1240
Destroy me not !—ah, father's curse ill-starred !

Who wills to save an utter-innocent man ?”
 Ah, many willed, but far behind were left
 With feet outstripped. Loosed from the toils at last
 Of clean-cut reins,—I know not in what wise,— 1245
 He falls, yet breathing for short space of life.
 Vanished the steeds and that accursèd monster,
 The bull, mid rock-strewn ground, I know not where.
 Thrall am I verily of thine house, O king ;
 Howbeit so foul a charge—I never can 1250
 Believe it of thy son, that he is vile,
 Not though all womankind should hang themselves,
 Though one should fill with writing all the pine
 In Ida :—he is righteous, this I know.

CHORUS.

Woe for accomplishment of new disaster ! 1255
 No refuge is there from the doom of fate.

THESEUS.

For hatred of the man who thus hath fared,
 Glad for this tale was I : but now, for awe
 Of heaven, and for that he is yet my son,
Nor glad am I nor sorry for these ills.

1260

MESSENGER.

How then ?—must we bear yonder broken man
 Hither ?—or in what wise perform thy pleasure ?
 Bethink thee : if my counsel thou wilt heed,
 Harsh to thy stricken son thou wilt not be.

THESEUS.

Bear him, that I may see before mine eyes 1265
 Him who denied that he had stained my bed,
 By words and heaven’s judgment to convict him.

[Exit Messenger.]

CHORUS.

Love, under thy dominion
Unbending hearts bow low
Of Gods, and hearts of mortals,
When, flashing through thy portals
On glory-gleaming pinion, 1270
Flits Eros to and fro ;
Love, under thy dominion
Unbending hearts bow low.

Gold-glittering wings wide-soaring,
They rain down witchery,
O'er maddened hearts prevailing,
O'er earth triumphant sailing,
O'er music of the roaring
Of spray-bemantled sea,
Gold-glittering wings wide-soaring,
They rain down witchery.

He kindleth with his yearning
* All things of earth-born race ;
The mountain's whelps he thrilleth,
The ocean's brood he filleth,
Where'er the sun's eye burning
Down-looketh on earth's face,
He kindleth with his yearning
All things of earth-born race.

They bend—all, all are bending,
Love-queen, beneath thy hand ! 1280
O crownèd brows, whom loyal
Vassals acclaim sole-royal

By spells all-comprehending
 In sky and sea and land ;
 They bend—all, all are bending,
 Love-queen, beneath thy hand !

Enter Artemis.

ARTEMIS.

Thou high-born scion of Aigeus, I call upon thee :
 Theseus, give ear unto me.
 It is Artemis, Lëto's Daughter, that nameth thy name :
 Why dost thou joy in thy shame ? [1285
 Thou hast murdered thy son unrighteously, thereto
 moved

Of the lies of thy wife unproved.
 By infatuate folly all-manifest, lo, thou wast bound.
 How wilt thou hide underground 1290
 Thy dishonour, or soar to the heaven, by changing thy
 life

To escape from this anguish-strife ?
 For the part that was erstwhile thine in the good man's
 lot,

Behold, it is not. 1295

Theseus, hear thou the posture of thy woes ;—
 Yet have I no help for thee, only pain ;
 But I have come to show the righteousness
 Of thy son, that in fair fame he may die,
 And thy wife's fever-flame,—yet in some sort 1300
 Her nobleness,—who, stung by goads of (her) *Cap. line*
 Whom most we loathe, who joy in purity,
 Of all the Gods, was lovesick for thy son,
 Yet strove by reason to o'ermaster passion,
 And died through wiles unsanctioned of her nurse, 1305
 Who under oath-seal told thy son her pangs ;

And he, even as was righteous, would not heed
 The tempting ; no, nor when sore-wronged of thee -
 Broke he the oath's pledge, for he feared the Gods.
 But she, adread to be of sin convict, 1310
 Wrote that false writing, and by treachery so
 Destroyed thy son :—and thou believedst her !

THESEUS.

Ah me !

ARTEMIS.

Is it torture, Theseus ?—Nay, but hear me out,
 That hearing all thou mayst the more lament.
 Three soothfast curses hadst thou of thy sire : 1315
 One hast thou thus misused, O villain thou,
 Against thy son, which might have quelled a foe !
 Thy sire the Sea-king, in his love's despite,
 Gave as he needs must, seeing he had pledged him :
 Yet wicked in his eyes and mine art thou, 1320
 Who wouldst not wait for proof, nor prophet's voice,
 Nor yet make inquisition, nor wouldst trace
 Time's slow step, but with haste that did thee wrong
 Didst hurl the curse upon thy son, and slay.

THESEUS.

Queen, ruin seize me !

ARTEMIS.

Deep thy sin ; but yet 1325
 Even thou for this mayst win forgiveness still :
 For Kypris willed that all this should befall
 To glut her spite. And this the Gods' wont is :—
 None doth presume to thwart the fixed design
 Willed by his fellow : still aloof we stand. 1330
 Else be thou sure that, but for dread of Zeus,

I never would have known this depth of shame,
 To suffer one, of all men best beloved
 Of me, to die. But thy transgression, first,
 Thine ignorance from utter sin redeems ; ✓ 1335
 Then, by her death thy wife made void all test ✓
 Of these her words, and won thy credence so.
 Now, most on thee this storm of woe hath burst ;
 Yet grief is mine : for when the righteous die
 The Gods joy not. The wicked, and withal 1340
 Their children and their homes, do we destroy.

CHORUS.

Lo, lo, the stricken one borne
 Hitherward, with his young flesh torn
 And his golden head of its glory shorn !
 Ah, griefs of the house !—what doom
 Twofold on thine halls hath come
 By the Gods' will shrouded in sorrow's gloom !
Enter bearers with Hippolytus.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Woe, woe for a son
 By the doom of his sire
 All marred and undone ! 1350
 Through mine head leapeth fire
 Of the agony-flashes, and throbbeth my brain like a
 hard-stricken lyre.
 Let me rest—ah forbear !
 For my strength is sped.
 Cursèd horses, ye were
 Of mine own hands fed,
 Yet me have ye wholly destroyed, yet me have ye
 stricken dead !

For the Gods' sake, bear
 Me full gently, each thrall !
 Thou to right—have a care !— 1360
 Soft let your hands fall ;
 Tenderly bear the sore-mangled, on-stepping in time,
 one and all,

The unhappy on-bearing,
 And cursèd, I ween,
 Of his father's own erring :—
 Ah Zeus, hast thou seen ?
 Innocent I, ever fearing the Gods, who was wholly
 heart-clean

*seems
not
his*
 Above all men beside,—
 Lo, how am I thrust
 Unto Hades, to hide
 My life in the dust !
 All vainly I revered God, and in vain unto man was
 I just.

Let the stricken one be !— 1370
 Ah, mine anguish again !—
 Give ye sleep unto me,
 Death-salve for my pain,
 The sleep of the sword for the wretched—I long, oh I
 long to be slain.

1
 Dire curse of my father !—
 Sins, long ago wrought
 Of mine ancestors, gather : 1380
 Their doom tarries not,
 But the scourge overfloweth the innocent—wherefore
 on me is it brought ?

Ah for words of a spell,
 That my soul might take flight
 From the tortures, with fell
 Unrelentings that smite !
 Oh for the blackness of Hades, the sleep of Necessity's
 night !

ARTEMIS.

Unhappy, bowed 'neath what disaster's yoke !
 Thine own heart's nobleness hath ruined thee. | 1390

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah, perfume-breath celestial !—mid my pains
 I feel thee, and mine anguish is assuaged.
 Lo in this place the Goddess Artemis !

ARTEMIS.

Yea, hapless one, of Gods best friend to thee.

HIPPOLYTUS.

O Queen, seest thou my plight—the stricken one ? 1395

ARTEMIS.

I see—but tears are to mine eyes forbid.

HIPPOLYTUS.

None now shall hark thine hounds, nor do thee ser-
 vice—

ARTEMIS.

Ah no !—Yet dear to me thou perishest.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Nor tend thy steeds, nor guard thine images.

ARTEMIS.

This all-pernicious Kypris hath contrived— 1400

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah me ! what Goddess blasts me now I know—

ARTEMIS.

Jealous for honour, wroth with chastity.

HIPPOLYTUS. ♀

Three hath one hand destroyed ; I see it now.

ARTEMIS.

Thy father—thee—thy father's wife the third.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Yea, and I wail my father's misery. 1405

ARTEMIS.

By plots of deity was he beguiled.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah father, woe is thee for this mischance !

THESEUS.

I am slain, my son : no joy have I in life !

HIPPOLYTUS. ♀

More than myself I mourn thee for thine error.

THESEUS.

Would God I could but die for thee, my son ! 1410

HIPPOLYTUS.

Ah, bitter gifts of that Sea-god, thy sire !

THESEUS.

Ah that the word had never passed my lips !

HIPPOLYTUS.

Wherefore ?—thou wouldst for wrath have slain me still.

THESEUS.

Yea, for the Gods had caused my wit to stumble.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Oh that men's curses could but strike the Gods ! 1415.

ARTEMIS.

Let be : for even in the nether gloom
Not unavenged shall be the stroke that fell
Upon thy frame through rage of Kypris' spite,
For thy pure soul's and for thy reverence' sake.
For upon one, her minion, with mine hand— 1420
One who is dearest of all men to her—
With these unerring shafts will I avenge me. ✓
And to thee, hapless one, for these thy woes
High honours will I give in Trœzen-town.
Ere their espousals shall all maids unwed 1425
For thee cut off their hair : through age on age
Full harvests shalt thou reap of grief in tears.
Ever of thee song-waking memory
Shall live in virgins ; nor shall Phædra's love
Forgotten in thy story be unhymned. 1430
But thou, O son of ancient Aigeus, take

Thy child into thine arms, and fold him close.
 Not of thy will thou slewest him, and well
 May men transgress when Gods are thrusting on.

Thee too I charge, Hippolytus—hate not 1435

Thy father: 'tis by fate thou perishest.

Whewell
 542 Farewell: I may not gaze upon the dead,

Nor may with dying gasps pollute my sight:

And now I see that thou art near the end.

[*Exit Artemis.*]

HIPPOLYTUS.

Farewell to thy departing, maiden blest. 1440

Light falls on thee long fellowship's severance!¹

Lo, I forgive my father at thy suit,

As heretofore have I obeyed thy word.

Ah, o'er mine eyes even now the darkness draws!

Take, father, take my body, and upraise. 1445

THESEUS.

Ah me! what dost thou, child, to hapless me?

HIPPOLYTUS.

I am gone—yea, I behold the gates of death!

¹ This line has been a stumbling-block to editors. It has been interpreted as a reproach, and so quite out of harmony with Hippolytus' attitude to her, besides being unjust. In reality it is a very natural touch—this sigh (not reproach) of the mortal who cannot but feel how much more it must, by the necessities of their natures, mean to him than to her. To him it is the end, the going into outer darkness: to her a spot of shadow on a bright unending existence. The idea is by no means unique in literature, any more than in life. A single poem of Tennyson's furnishes many parallels:—c.f. *In Memoriam* xl vv. 5—8, and xli, lx—lxiv, lxxxv vv. 6, 7, 8, ciii, 12.

THESEUS.

Wilt leave me—and my conscience murder-stained ?

HIPPOLYTUS.

No, no ! I do absolve thee of my death.

THESEUS.

How say'st thou ?—dost assoil me of thy blood ? 1450

HIPPOLYTUS.

I call to witness Bow-queen Artemis.

THESEUS.

Dearest, how noble show'st thou to thy sire !

HIPPOLYTUS.

Father, farewell thou too—untold farewells !

THESEUS.

Woe for thy reverent soul, thy righteous heart !

HIPPOLYTUS.

Pray to have such sons—sons in wedlock born. ✓ 1455

THESEUS.

Forsake me not, my son !—be strong to bear !

HIPPOLYTUS.

My strength is overborne—I am gone, my father.
Cover my face with mantles with all speed. [Dies.

THESEUS.

O bounds of Athens, Pallas' glorious realm,
 What hero have ye lost ! Ah, woe is me ! 1460
 Kypris, how oft shall I recall thy wrong !

CHORUS.

On the city hath lighted a stroke without warning,
 On all hearts desolation.
 Rain down, O ye fast-falling tears of our mourning !
 When the mighty are fallen, their burial-oblation 1465
 Is the wail of a nation.¹

[*Exeunt Omnes.*]

¹ 1462-66 allude to the death of Pericles, which happened shortly before the representation of this play. The poet in fact changed, to meet the occasion, the original ending, which ran thus :—

O blest one, what honours have fallen to thee,
 O hero, because of thy chastity !
 Never shall aught be more of worth
 Than virtue unto the sons of earth ;
 For soon or late on the fear of God
 Goodly reward shall be bestowed.

[Stobæus, *Florilegium.*]

HECUBA.

ARGUMENT.

WHEN *Troy* was taken by the Greeks, *Hecuba*, the wife of *Priam*, and her daughters, *Kassandra* the prophetess, and *Polyxena*, with the other women of *Troy*, were made slaves, being portioned among the victors, so that *Kassandra* became the concubine of *Agamemnon*. But *Polydorus*, the youngest of *Priam*'s sons, had long ere this been sent, with much treasure of gold, for safe keeping to his father's friend, *Polymestor* king of *Thrace*, so that his mother had one consolation of hope amidst her afflictions. Now the host of *Greece* could not straightway sail home, because to the spirit of their dead hero *Achilles* was given power to hold the winds from blowing, till meet sacrifice were rendered to him, even a maiden of *Troy*, most beautiful of the seed royal; and for this they chose *Polyxena*. And now king *Polymestor*, lusting for the gold, and fearing no vengeance of man, slew his ward, the lad *Polydorus*, and flung his body into the sea, so that it was in process of time cast up by the waves on the shore whereby was the camp of the Greeks, and was brought to *Hecuba*. And herein are told the sorrow of *Hecuba* and her revenge.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Phantom of POLYDORUS, son of Priam King of Troy, and Hecuba.

HECUBA, wife of Priam, and mother of Polydorus and Polyxena

POLYXENA, youngest daughter of Priam and Hecuba.

ODYSSEUS, chiefest in subtlety of the Greeks, King of Ithaca.

TALTHYBIUS, herald of King Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON, King of Mycenæ, and captain of the host of Greece.

POLYMESTOR, King of Eastern Thrace, which is called the Chersonese.

HANDMAID of Hecuba.

CHORUS of captive Trojan women.

Attendants, Greek and Thracian guards, captive women.

SCENE :—Before Agamemnon's tent in the camp of the Greeks on the coast of the Thracian Chersonese.

HECUBA.

*The phantom of Polydorus appears hovering over the tent
of Agamemnon.*

POLYDORUS.

I COME from vaults of death, from gates of darkness,
Where from the Gods aloof doth Hades dwell,
Polydorus, born of Hecuba, Kisseus' child,
And Priam, who, when peril girt the town
Of Phrygians, by the spear of Greece to fall, 5
In fear from Troyland privily sent me forth
To Polymestor's halls, his Thracian friend,
Lord of the fair tilth-lands of Chersonese,
Who with the spear rules that horse-loving folk.
And secretly with me my sire sent forth 10
Much gold, that, should the towers of Ilium fall,
His sons yet living might not beggared be.
Youngest of Priam's house was I: for this
He sent me forth the land, whose youthful arm
Availed not or to sway the shield or spear. 15
So, while unbowed the land's defences stood,
And yet unshattered were the towers of Troy,
While triumphed yet my brother Hector's spear,
Fair-nurtured by the Thracian, my sire's friend,
Like some young sapling grew I—hapless I! 20

But, when Troy perished, perished Hector's soul,
And my sire's hearths were made a desolation,
And himself at the god-built altar fell
Slain by Achilles' son, the murder-stained,
Then me for that gold's sake my father's friend 25
Slays, and the slaughtered wretch mid sea-surge cast,
That in his halls himself might keep the gold.
Here on the beach I welter, surf-borne there
Drift on the racing waves' recoil and rush,
Tombless, unwept. O'er my dear mother's head 30
Now flit I, leaving tenantless my body.
This is the third day that I hover so,
Even all the time that in this Chersonese
My hapless mother tarrieth, haled from Troy.
And all the Achaians idle with their ships 35
Sit on the beaches of this Thracian land.
For Peleus' son above his tomb appeared,
And all the Hellenic host Achilles stayed,
Even as they homeward aimed the brine-dipt oar,
And claimed for his Polyxena my sister, 40
For sacrifice and honour to his tomb ;
Yea, and shall win, nor of his hero-friends
Giftless shall be. And Fate is leading on
Unto her death my sister on this day.
And of two children shall my mother see 45
Two corpses, mine, and that her hapless daughter's.
For I, to gain a tomb, will—wretch—appear
Before her handmaid's feet amidst the surge.
For with the Lords of Death have I prevailed
'Twixt mother-hands to fall, and win a tomb. 50
Accomplished shall be all for which I longed.
But agèd Hecuba's sight will I avoid ;
For forth of Agamemnon's tent she sets

Her feet, appalled by this my ghostly phantom.

Hecuba, dressed as a slave, and supported by fellow-captives, appears coming out of Agamemnon's tent.

Mother, who after royal halls hast seen 55

The day of thralldom, how thy depth of woe

Equals thine height of weal! A God bears down

The scale with olden bliss heaped, ruining thee.

[*Exit.*]

HECUBA.

Lead forth, O my children, the stricken in years from
the tent. [60

O lead her, upbearing the steps of your fellow-thrall

Now, O ye daughters of Troy, but of old your
queen.

Clasp me, uphold, help onward the eld-forspent,

Laying hold of my wrinkled hand, lest for weakness
I fall ;

And, sustained by a curving arm, thereon as I lean,

I will hasten onward with tottering pace,

Speeding my feet in a laggard's race.

O lightning-splendour of Zeus, O mirk of the night,

Why quake I for visions in slumber that haunt me

With terrors, with phantoms? O Earth's majestic
might, 70

Mother of dreams that hover in dusk-winged flight,

I cry to the vision of darkness "Avaunt thee!"—

The dream of my son who was sent unto Thrace to be
saved from the slaughter,

The dream that I saw of Polyxena's doom, my dear-
loved daughter,

Which I saw, which I knew, which abideth to daunt
me.

Gods of the Underworld, save ye my son,
 Mine house's anchor, its only one, 80
 By the friend of his father warded well
 Where the snows of Thrace veil forest and fell !
 But a strange new stroke draweth near,
 And a strain of wailing for them that wail.
 Ah, never as now did the heart in me quail
 With the thrilling of ceaseless fear.
 O that Kassandra I might but descry
 To arrede me my dreams, O daughters of Troy,
 Or Helenus, god-taught seer !
 For a dappled fawn I beheld which a wolf's red fangs
 were tearing, 90
 Which he dragged from my knees whereto she had
 clung in her piteous despairing.
 This terror withal on my spirit is come,
 That the ghost of the mighty Achilles hath risen, and
 stood
 High on the crest of his earth-heaped tomb ;
 And he claimeth a guerdon of honour, the spilling of
 blood,
 And a woe-stricken Trojan maiden's doom.
 O Gods, I am suppliant before you !—in any wise turn,
 I implore you,
 This fate from the child of my womb !

Enter Chorus of Trojan Captive Women.

CHORUS.

I have hasted hitherward ; the pavilions of my lord, 100
 O my queen, have I forsaken, in the which I sojourn
 here,

Whom the lot hath doomed to fall unto a king, a thrall
 From Ilium chased, the quarry of Achaian hunters'
 spear,—

Not for lightening of thy pain ; nay, a burden have I
 ta'en

Of heavy tidings, herald of sore anguish unto thee,
 For that met is the array of Achaia, and they say
 That thy child unto Achilles a sacrifice must be. 110

For thou knowest how in sheen of golden armour seen
 He stood upon his tomb, and on the ocean-pacing
 ships

Laid a spell, that none hath sailed,—yea, though the
 halliards brailed

The sails up to the yards ;—and a cry rang from his
 lips :

“ Ho, Danaans ! whither now, leaving unredeemed your
 vow

Of honour to my tomb, and my glory spurned
 away ? ”

Then a surge of high contention clashed : the spear-host
 in dissension 120

Was cleft, some crying, “ Yield his tomb the victim ! ”
 —others, “ Nay ! ”

Now the King was fervent there that thy daughter they
 should spare,

For that Agamemnon loveth thy prophet-bacchanal.
 But the sons of Theseus twain,¹ Athens' scions, for thy
 bane

Pleaded both, yet for the victim did their vote at
 variance fall.

Demophon and Akamas, sons of Theseus by Phædra.

“Ye cannot choose but crown with the life-blood
streaming down
Achilles' grave!” they clamoured—“and, for this
Kassandra's bed,
Shall any dare prefer to Achilles' prowess her— 130
A concubine, a bondslave?—It shall never be!” they
said.

But the vehemence of speech, each contending against
each,
Was balanced, as it were, till the prater subtle-
souled,
The man of honied tongue, the truckler to the throng,
Laertes' spawn, 'gan fashion the host unto his mould:
“We may not thrust aside like an outcast wretch,” he
cried,
“The bravest Danaan heart and the stoutest Danaan
hand,
All to spare our hands the stain of the blood of bond-
maid slain,
Neither suffer that a voice from the ranks of them
that stand

In the presence of Hell's Queen should with scoffing
bitter-keen
Cry, ‘Thankless from the plains of Troy the Danaans
have sped, 140
Thankless unto Danaan kin whose graves are thick
therein,
Who died to save their brethren—the soon-forgotten
dead!’”

And Odysseus draweth near—even now shall he be
here

From thy breast to rend thy darling, from thine age-
enfeebled grasp.

Hie thee to the temples now : haste, before the altars
bow :

Crouch low to Agamemnon, his knees in suppliance
clasp.

Lift up thy voice and cry to the Gods that sit on high :
Let the Nether-dwellers hear it through their dark-
ness ringing wild.

For, except they turn and spare, and thy prevalence of
prayer

150

Redeem thee from bereavement of thy ruin-stricken
child,

Thou must surely live to gaze where a maiden on her
face

On a grave-mound lieth slaughtered, while the
darkly-gleaming tide

Welleth, wellet from the neck which the golden
mockeries deck,

And all her body crimsons in the bubbling horror
dyed.

HECUBA.

Woe for mine anguish ! what outcry availeth

To thrill forth its agony-throes ?

What wailing its fulness of torment outwaileth—

Wretched eld—bitter bondage where heart and flesh
faileth ?

Ah me for my woes !

What champion is left me ?—what sons to defend
me ?—

160

What city remains to me ? Gone

Are my lord and my sons! Whither now shall I
wend me?

Whither flee?—Is there God—is there fiend shall
befriend me?

Alone—alone!

Daughters of Troy—O ye heralds of ruin, ye heralds of
ruin!—

What profits my life any more, whom your words
have undone, have undone?

Now unto yonder pavilion, to tell to my child her
undoing, 170

Lead, O ye wretchedest feet, lead ye the eld-stricken
one!

O daughter, O child of a mother most wretched, forth
faring, forth faring,

Come from the tent, O hearken the voice of thy
mother's word,

To the end thou mayst know what a rumour of awful
despairing, despairing,

Concerning the life of thee, my belovèd, but now
have I heard!

Enter Polyxena.

POLYXENA.

O mother, my mother, what meaneth thy crying?

What strange dread thing

Is this that thou heraldest

That hath scared me, like to a bird forth-flying 180

On startled wing

Out of the peace of her nest?

HECUBA.

Alas! woe's me, my daughter!

POLYXENA.

What word of ill-boding is thine? From thy preluding
ills I divine.

HECUBA.

Ah me, life doomed unto slaughter!

POLYXENA.

Tell it out, tell it out, neither hide o'erlong;
For mine heart, my mother, is heavy with dread
For the tidings that come in thy moan.

HECUBA.

O child, O child of the grief-distraught!

POLYXENA.

Ah, what is the message to me thou has brought?

HECUBA.

Death: for the Argive warrior-throng
Are in one mind set, that thy blood be shed 190
On the grave of Peleus' son.

POLYXENA.

Ah me, my mother, how can thy tongue
Speak out the horror?—Let all be said:
O mother mine, say on.

HECUBA.

O child, I have heard it, the shame and the wrong,
Of the Argive vote, of the doom forth sped,
Of the hope of thy life gone—gone!

POLYXENA.

O stricken of anguish beyond all other !
O filled with affliction of desolate days !
What tempest, what tempest of outrage and shame,
Too loathly to look on, too awful to name, [200
Hath a fiend uproused, that on thee it came,
That thy woeful child by her woeful mother
Nevermore down thralldom's paths shall pace !
For me, like a youngling mountain-pastured,
Like a child of the herd, shalt thou see torn far,
In woe from thy woeful embraces torn,
And, with throat by the steel of the altar shorn,
Down to the underworld darkness borne,
In the Land Unseen to lie, overmastered
Of misery, there where the death-stricken are. 210
For thee, for the dark days closing around thee,
Mother, with uttermost wailings I cry :
But for this, the life that I now must lack,
For all the ruin thereof and the wrack,
I wail not, I, as I gaze aback :—
O nay, but a happier lot hath found me,
Forasmuch as to me it is given to die.

CHORUS.

But lo, Odysseus comes with hurrying foot,
To tell thee, Hecuba, the new decree,

Enter Odysseus.

ODYSSEUS.

Lady, thou know'st, I trow, the host's resolve,
And the vote cast, yet will I tell it thee :
The Achaians will to slay Polyxena

Thy child, upon Achilles' grave-mound's height.
Me they appoint to usher thitherward
And bring the maid : the president and priest
Of sacrifice Achilles' son shall be.
Know'st thou thy part then ?—be not torn away 225
Perforce, nor brave me to the strife of hands ;
But know thy might, thine imminence of ills.
Wise is it even mid ills to hearken reason.

HECUBA.

Woe ! A sore trial is at hand, meseems,
Burdened with groanings, and fulfilled of tears. 230
I died not there where well might I have died ;
Nor Zeus destroyed, but holdeth me in life
To see—O wretch !—ills more than ills o'erpast.
Yet, if the bond may question of the free
Things that should vex them not, nor gall the heart,
Then fits it that thou be the questioned now, [235
And that I ask, and hearken thy reply.

ODYSSEUS.

So be it : ask, I grudge not the delay.

HECUBA.

Rememberest thou thy coming unto Troy
A spy, in rags vile-vestured ; from thine eyes 240
Trickled adown thy cheeks the gout of gore ?

ODYSSEUS.

I do, for deep it sank into mine heart.

HECUBA.

And Helen knew thee, and told none save me ?

ODYSSEUS.

I call to mind : mid peril grim I fell.

HECUBA.

And to my knees didst cling, wast lowly then ? 245

ODYSSEUS.

With grasp of death closed on thy robes mine hand.

HECUBA.

Ay, and what saidst thou—thou my bondman then ?

ODYSSEUS.

Words—words full many found I, death to 'scape.

HECUBA.

I saved thee—saved thee,—sent thee forth the land ?

ODYSSEUS.

Ay, thanks to thee, I see the sun's light now. 250

HECUBA.

Art thou not caitiff proved then by these plots,

Who wast by me so dealt with as thou sayest,

Yet dost us nought good, but thine utmost ill ?

A thankless spawn, all ye that grasp at honour

By babbling to the mob !—let me not know you, 255

Who injure friends, and nothing reck thereof,

So ye may something say to please the rabble !

What crafty wiliness imagined ye

This, on my child to pass your murder-vote ?

Was't duty drew them on to human slaughter 260

Upon a grave more meet for oxen slain ?
Or doth Achilles, fain to requite with death
His slayers, justly aim death's shaft at her ?
Now never aught of harm wrought she to him.
Helen should he demand, his tomb's fit victim : 265
'Twas she to Troy that drew him, and destroyed.
But if some chosen captive needs must die,
In beauty peerless, not to us points this ;
For Tyndareus' daughter matchless is in form,
And was found wronging him no less than we. 270
This plea against his " justice " I array.
But what return thou ow'st me, on my claim,
Hear—thou didst touch mine hand, as thou dost own,
And wrinkled cheek, low cowering at my feet.
Lo, in my turn thine hand, thy beard, I touch, 275
That grace of old reclaiming, now thy suppliant.
Not from mine arms tear thou my child away,
Nor slay ye her : suffice the already dead.
In her I joy, in her forget my woes.
For many a lost bliss she my solace is : 280
My city she, nurse, staff, guide for my feet.
Not tyrannously the strong should use their strength,
Nor they which prosper think to prosper aye.
I too once was, but now am I no more,
And all my weal one day hath reft from me. 285
O, by thy beard, have thou respect to me !
Pity me : go thou to Achaia's host ;
Persuade them how that shame it is to slay
Women, whom first ye slew not, when ye tore
These from the altars, but for pity spared. 290
Lo, the same law is stablished among you
For free and bond as touching blood-shedding.
Thine high repute, how ill soe'er thou speak,

Shall sway them : for the same speech carrieth not [29
Like weight from men contemned and men revered.

CHORUS.

There is no human nature so relentless
That, hearkening to thy groanings and thy wails
Long lengthened out, would not let fall the tear.

ODYSSEUS.

Receive instruction, Hecuba, nor him
For wrath count foe, who wisely counselleth. 30
Thy life, through whom I found deliverance,
Ready am I to save ; I stand thereto.
But what to all I said, I unsay not—
That now, Troy taken, we should yield thy child,
At our great champion's claim, for sacrifice. 30
For of this cometh weakness in most states,
That, though a man be brave and patriot-souled,
No guerdon gains he more than baser men.
But we, we deem Achilles honour-worthy,
Who died for Hellas nobly as man may. 31
Were this not shame then, as a friend to treat
Him living, but no more when he is gone ?
Yea, what will one say then, if once again
The host must gather for the strife with foes.
“ Fight shall we,” will they cry, “ or cling to life, 31
Beholding how unhonoured go the dead ? ”
Yea, for myself, how scant soe'er in life
My fare for daily need, this should suffice :
Yet fain would I my tomb were reverence-crowned—
Mine ; for no fleeting gratitude is this. 32
But, if thou plain of hardship, hear mine answer :
With us there be grey matrons, agèd sires,

Not any whit less wretched than art thou,
And brides of noblest bridegrooms left forlorn,
Whose corpses yonder dust of Ida shrouds. 325
Endure this : we, if err we do to honour
The brave, content will stand convict of folly.
But ye barbarians, neither count as friends
Your friends, nor render your heroic dead
Homage, that Hellas so may prosperous rise, 330
And your reward may match your policy.

CHORUS.

Woe! What a curse is thralldom's nature, aye
Enduring wrong by strong constraint o'erborne!

HECUBA.

My daughter, wasted are my words in air,
Flung vainly forth my pleadings for thy life. 335
If thou canst aught prevail beyond thy mother,
Be instant ; as with nightingale's sad throat
Moan, moan, that thou be not bereft of life.
Fall piteously at this Odysseus' knee :
Melt him. A plea thou hast—he too hath babes ; 340
Well may he so compassionate thy lot.

POLYXENA.

I see, Odysseus, how thou hid'st thine hand
Beneath thy vesture, how thou turn'st away
Thy face, lest I should touch thy beard. Fear not :
From Zeus safe art thou, from the Suppliant's Champion.
I will go with thee, both for that I must, [345
And that I long to die. And, were I loth,
A coward girl life-craving were I proved.
For, wherefore should I live, whose sire was king
Of all the Phrygians? Such was my life's dawn : 350

Thereafter was I nurtured mid bright hopes,
 A bride for kings, for whose hand rivalry
 Ran high, whose hall and hearth should hail me queen
 And I—ah me!—was Lady of the Dames
 Of Ida, cynosure amidst the maidens, 35.
 Peer of the Gods—except that man must die:—
 And now a slave! The name alone constrains me
To long for death, so strange it is to me.
 More—haply upon brutal-hearted lords
 I might light, one that would for silver buy me,— 36
 Sister of Hector and of many a chief,—
 Force me to grind the quern his halls within,
 And make me sweep his dwelling, stand before
 The loom, while days of bitterness drag on.
 And, somewhere bought, some bondslave shall defile
 My couch, accounted once a prize for princes. [36
 Never!—free light mine eyes shall last behold :
To Death my body will I dedicate.
 Lead on, Odysseus, lead me to my doom ;
 For I see no assurance, nor in hope, 37
 No, nor in day-dreams, of good days to be.
 Mother, do thou in no wise hinder me
 By word or deed ; but thou consent with me
 Unto my death, ere shame unmeet befall.
 For whoso is not wont to taste of ills 37
 Chafes, while he bears upon his neck the yoke,
 And death for him were happier far than life ;
For life ignoble is but crushing toil.

CHORUS.

Strange is the impress, clear-stamped upon men,
 Of gentle birth, and aye the noble name 38
 Higher aspires in them that worthily bear it.

HECUBA.

My daughter, nobly said : yet anguish cleaves
Unto that "nobly." But if Peleus' son
Must gain this grace, and ye must flee reproach,
Odysseus, slay not her in any wise ; 385
But me, lead me unto Achilles' pyre :
Stab me, spare not : 'twas I gave Paris birth
Who with his shafts smote Peleus' son and slew.

ODYSSEUS.

Not thee, grey mother, did Achilles' ghost
Require the Achaian men to slay, but her. // 390

HECUBA.

Yet ye—at least me with my daughter slay : ✓
Then twice so deep a draught of blood shall sink
To earth and to the dead who claimeth this.

ODYSSEUS.

Thy daughter's death sufficeth : death on death
Must not be heaped. Would God we owed not this ! 395

HECUBA.

I must—I must die where my daughter dies !

ODYSSEUS.

Must ?—I knew not that I had found a master ! } ✓

HECUBA.

As ivy clings to oak will I clasp her.

ODYSSEUS.

Not if thou heed a wiser than thyself.

HECUBA.

Consent I will not to let go my child. 400

ODYSSEUS.

Nor I will hence depart and leave her here.

POLYXENA.

Mother, heed me : and thou, Laertes' son,
O bear with parents which have cause to rage.
Mother, poor mother, strive not with the strong.
Wouldst thou be earthward hurled, and wound thy
flesh, 405

Thine agèd flesh, with violence thrust away ?—
Be hustled shamefully, by young strong arms
Haled ?—This shouldst thou. Nay, 'tis not worthy
thee.

But mother, darling mother, give thine hand,
Thy dear, dear hand, and lay thy cheek to mine : 410
Since never more, but this last time of all
Shall I behold the sun's beam and his orb.
Receive of all my greetings this the last :—
O mother—breast that bare me—I pass deathward.

HECUBA.

O daughter, I shall yet live on in bondage ! 415

POLYXENA.

Bridegroom nor bridal !—nought of all my due !

HECUBA.

Piteous thy plight, my child, and wretched I.

POLYXENA.

There shall I lie in Hades, far from thee.

HECUBA.

Ah me, what shall I do?—where end my life?

POLYXENA.

To die a slave, whose father was free-born! 420

HECUBA.

In fifty sons nor part nor lot have I!

POLYXENA.

What shall I tell to Hector and thy lord?

HECUBA.

Report me of all women wretchedest.

POLYXENA.

O bosom, breasts that sweetly nurtured me!

HECUBA.

Woe is thee, daughter, for thy fate untimely! 425

POLYXENA.

Mother, farewell: Kassandra, fare thee well.

HECUBA.

Others *fare well*—not for thy mother this.

POLYXENA.

Mid Thracians lives my brother Polydorus.

HECUBA.

If he doth live. I doubt : so dark is all.

POLYXENA.

He lives, and he shall close thy dying eyes. 43

HECUBA.

I—I have died ere dying, through my woes.

POLYXENA.

Muffle mine head, Odysseus, and lead on.

For, ere ye slay me, hath my mother's moan

Melted mine heart, and mine is melting hers.

O Light !—for yet on thy name may I call— 43

Yet all my share in thee is that scant space

Hence to the sword-edge and Achilles' pyre.

[*Exeunt Odysseus and Polyxena*]

HECUBA.

Ah me ! I swoon—beneath me fail my limbs !

O daughter, touch thy mother—reach thine hand—

Give it, nor childless leave me !—Friends—undone !—

Oh thus to see that sister of Zeus' sons, [44

Helen the Spartan !—for by her bright eyes

In shameful fall she brought down prosperous Troy.¹

[*Swoon*]

¹ These three lines, in which the spirit overcomes the flesh in a fierce rally of the failing powers, that the swooning mother may concentrate her burning sense of wrong her impotent longing for vengeance, in a curse upon the author of her woes, are so true to human nature, so appropriate to the character of Hecuba, that it seems strange that commentators should have proposed to omit them.

CHORUS.¹

(Str. 1)

O breeze, O breeze, over sea-ways racing,
Who onward waftest the ocean-pacing

Fleet-flying keels o'er the mere dark-swelling,
Whitherward wilt thou bear me, the sorrow-laden ?
From what slave-mart shall the captive maiden

Pass into what strange master's dwelling ?
To a Dorian haven ?—or where, overstreaming 450
Fat Phthia-land's meads, laugh loveliest-gleaming
Babe-waters from founts of Apidanus welling ?

(Ant. 1)

Or, to misery borne by the oars brine-sweeping,
In the island-halls through days of weeping

Shall we dwell, where the first-born palm, ascending
From the earth, with the bay twined, glorifying
With enshrining frondage the couch where lying
Dear Lêto attained to her travail's ending, 460

"feeble and unnatural." It is a significant touch that Hecuba can imagine for the author of her sufferings no sterner retribution than even such sufferings:—"O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed, happy shall he be that rewardeth thee *as thou hast served us.*" c.f. also ll. 941-943 of this play.

¹ This has been cited as one of the so-called inappropriate and irrelevant chorus-songs of Euripides. But why should the poet, after bringing the situation to a climax in the pathos of the daughter's farewell, in the agony of the mother's bereavement, proceed to water his wine by obvious moralizings, or by commonplaces of commiseration ? When to add words of direct comment on a perfect situation would be "to gild refined gold," we may trust Euripides' artistic sense not to err. But that their fellow-captives, in view of what had befallen these, should be led to forecast their own fate, was (a) appropriate, for the theme had been already suggested by the words of Polyxena, ll. 359-364 ; (b) natural, if Homer was natural in Il. xix. 301-2.

There chanting of Artemis' bow all-golden,
 And the brows with the frontlet of gold enfolden,
 With the Delian maidens our voices blending?

(*Str.* 2)

Or in Pallas's Town to the car all-glorious
 Shall I yoke the steeds on the saffron-glowing¹
 Veil of Athênê, where flush victorious
 The garlands that cunningest fingers are throwing
 In manifold hues on its folds wide-flowing,— 470
 Or the brood of the Titans whom lightnings, that
 fell

Flame-wrapt from Kronion, in long sleep quell?

(*Ant.* 2)

Woe for our babes, for our fathers hoary!

Woe for our country, mid smoke and smoulder
 Crashing to ruin, and all her glory
 Spear-spoiled!—and an alien land shall behold her
 Bond who was free; for that Asia's shoulder [480
 Is bowed under Europe's yoke, and I dwell,
 An exile from home, in a dungeon of hell.

Enter Talthybius.

TALTHYBIUS.

Where shall I find her that of late was queen
 Of Ilium, Hecuba, ye maids of Troy? 485

CHORUS.

Lo there, anigh thee, on the ground outstretched,
 Talthybius, lies she muffled in her robes.

¹ *i.e.*, Embroider thereon the chariot and horses of Athênê, bearing the Goddess to battle against the Giants. The allusion is to the great saffron-dyed mantle which was carried, outspread like a sail, in solemn procession through the streets of Athens to the temple on the Acropolis, every fourth year, at the Great Panathenaic Festival.

TALTHYBIUS.

What shall I say, Zeus?—that thou look'st on men?
 Or that this fancy false we vainly hold
 For nought, who deem there is a race of Gods, 490
 While chance controlleth all things among men?
 This—was she not the wealthy Phrygians' queen?
 This—was she not all-prosperous Priam's wife?
 And now her city is all spear-o'erthrown;
 Herself a slave, old, childless, on the earth 495
 Lieth, her hapless head with dust defiled.
 Ah, old am I, yet be it mine to die
 Ere into any shameful lot I fall!
 Arise, ill-starred, and from the earth uplift
 Thy body and thine head all snow-besprent. 500

HECUBA.

Ha, who art thou that lettest not my frame
 Rest?—why disturb my grief, whoe'er thou be?

TALTHYBIUS.

Talthybius I, the Danaans' minister,
 Of Agamemnon sent, O queen, for thee.

HECUBA.

Friend, friend, art come because the Achaians will 505
 To slay me too?—How sweet thy tidings were!
 Haste we—make speed—O ancient, lead me on.

TALTHYBIUS.

Lady, that thou mayst bury thy dead child ✓
 I come in quest of thee; and sent am I
 Of Atreus' two sons and the Achaian folk. 510

HECUBA.

Woe!—what wouldst say? Not as to one death-
doomed

Cam'st thou to us, but all to publish ills?

Child, thou hast perished, from thy mother torn!

Childless, as touching thee, am I—ah wretch!

How did ye slay her?—how?—with reverence meet,

Or with brute outrage, as men slay a foe, [515

Ancient? Tell on, though all unsweet thy tale.

TALTHYBIUS.

Twofold tear-tribute wouldst thou win from me

In pity for thy child. Mine eyes shall weep

The tale, as by the grave when she was dying. 520

There met was all Achaia's warrior-host

Thronged at the grave to see thy daughter slain.

Then took Achilles' son Polyxena's hand,

And on the mound's height set her: I stood by.

And followed of the Achaians chosen youths 525

Whose hands should curb the strugglings of thy lamb.

Then taking 'twixt his hands a chalice brimmed,

Pure gold, Achilles' son to his dead sire

Drink-offerings poured, and signed me to proclaim

Silence unto the whole Achaian host. 530

By him I stood, and in the midst thus cried:

"Silence, Achaians! Hushed be all the host!

Peace!—not a word!"—so breathless stilled the folk.

Then spake the son of Peleus: "Father mine,

Accept from me these drops propitiatory, 535

Ghost-raising. Draw thou nigh to drink pure blood

Dark-welling from a maid. We give it thee,

The host and I. Gracious to us be thou:

Vouchsafe us to cast loose the sterns and curbs
 Of these ships, kindly home-return to win 540
 From Troy, and all to reach our fatherland."
 So spake he ; in that prayer joined all the host ;
 Then grasped his golden-plated falchion's hilt,
 Drew from the sheath, and to those chosen youths
 Of Argos' war-host signed to seize the maid. 545
 But she, being ware thereof, spake forth this speech :
 " O Argives, ye which laid my city low,
 Free-willed I die : on my flesh let no man
 Lay hand : my neck unflinching will I yield.
 But, by the Gods, let me stand free, the while 550
 Ye slay, that I may die free ; for I shame
 Slave to be called in Hades, who am royal."
 " Yea ! " like a great sea roared the host : the King
 Spake to the youths to let the maiden go.
 And they, soon as they heard that last behest 555
 Of him of chiefest might, drew back their hands.
 And she, when this she heard, her masters' word,
 Her vesture grasped, and from the shoulder's height
 Rent it adown her side, down to the waist,
 And bosom showed and breasts, as of a statue, 560
 Most fair ; and, bowing to the earth her knee,
 A word, of all words most heroic, spake¹ :
 " Lo here, O youth, if thou art fain to strike
 My breast, strike home : but if beneath my neck
 Thou wouldest, here my throat is bared to thee." 565
 And he, loth and yet fain, for ruth of her,
 Cleaves with the steel the channels of the breath :
 Forth gushed the life-springs : but she, even in death,
 Took chiefest thought decorously to fall,

¹ But the Scholiast interprets—

" She spake a word, of all most pitiful : "

Hiding what hidden from men's eyes should be. 570
 But when she had spent her breath 'neath that death-
 stroke,

Each Argive 'gan his task—no man the same :
 But some upon the dead were strawing leaves
 Out of their hands, and some heap high the pyre,
 Bringing pine-billets thither : whoso bare not 575
 Heard such and such rebukes of him that bare :
 “ Dost stand still, basest heart, with nought in hand—
 Robe for the maiden, neither ornament ?
 Nought wilt thou give to one in courage matchless,
 Noblest of soul ? ”

Such is the tale I tell 580

Of thy dead child. Most blest in motherhood
I count thee of all women, and most hapless.

CHORUS.

Dread bale on Priam's line and city hath poured
 Its lava-flood :—'tis heaven's resistless doom.

HECUBA.

Daughter, I know not on what ills to look, 585
 So many throng me : if to this I turn,
 That hindereth me : thence summoneth me again
 Another grief, on-ushering ills on ills.
 And now I cannot from my soul blot out
 Thine agony, that I should wail it not. 590
 Yet hast thou barred the worst, proclaimed to me
 So noble. Lo, how strange, that evil soil
 Heaven-blest with seasons fair, bears goodly crops,
 While the good, if it faileth of its dues,
 Gives evil fruit : but always among men 595
 The caitiff nothing else than evil is,

The noble, noble ; nor 'neath fortune's stress
 Marreth his nature, but is good alway.
 By blood, or nurture, is the difference made ?
 Sooth, gentle nurture bringeth lessoning 600
 In nobleness ; and whoso learns this well
 By honour's touchstone knoweth baseness too :—
 Ah, unavailing arrows of the mind¹ !
 But go thou, to the Argives this proclaim,
 That none my daughter touch, but that they keep 605
 The crowd thence : in a war-array untold
 Lawless the mob is, and the shipmen's license
 Outraveneth flame. 'Tis sin if one sin not.²

[*Exit Talthybius.*

But, ancient handmaid, take a vessel thou,
 And dip, and of the sea-brine hither bring, 610
 That with the last bath I may wash my child,—
 The bride unwedded, maid a maid no more,³—
 And lay her out—as meet is, how can I ?
 Yet as I may ; for lo, what plight is mine !
 Jewels from fellow-captives will I gather 615
 Which dwell my neighbour-thralls these tents within,
 If haply any, to our lords unknown,
 Hath any stolen treasure of her home.
 O stately halls, O home so happy once !
 O rich in fair abundance, goodliest offspring, 620
 Priam !—and I, a grey head crowned with sons !
 How are we brought to nought, of olden pride
 Stripped bare ! And lo, we men are puffed up,

¹ No philosophic moralizing can avail to assuage my sorrow.

² "They think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot." (1 Pet. iv., 4.)

³ As being united to Achilles in death.

One of us for the riches of his house,
 And one for honour in the mouths of men ! 625
 These things be nought. All vain the heart's devisings,
The vauntings of the tongue ! Most blest is he
 To whom no ill befalls as days wear on.

CHORUS.

(Str.)

My doom of disaster was written,
 The doom of mine anguish was sealed, 630
 When of Paris the pine-shafts were smitten
 Upon Ida, that earthward they reeled,
 To ride over ridges surf-whitened
 Till the bride-bed of Helen was won,
 Woman fairest of all that be lightened
 By the gold of the sun.

(Ant.)

For battle-toils, yea, desolations
 Yet sorer around us close ;
 And the folly of one is the nation's 640
 Destruction ; of alien foes
 Cometh ruin by Simois' waters.
 So judged is the doom that was given
 When on Ida the strife of the Daughters
 Of the Blessed was striven,

(Epode)

For battle, for murder, for ruin
 Of mine halls :—by Eurotas is moan, 650
 Where with tears for their homes' undoing
 The maidens Laconian groan,
 Where rendeth her tresses hoary
 The mother for sons that are dead,
 And her cheeks with woe-furrows are gory,
 And her fingers are red.

Enter Handmaid, with bearers carrying a covered corpse.

HANDMAID.

Women, O where is Hecuba, sorrow's queen,
Who passeth every man, all womankind,
In woes? No man shall take away her crown. 660

CHORUS.

What now, O hapless voice of evil-boding?
Shall they ne'er sleep, thy publishings of grief?

HANDMAID.

To Hecuba I bring this pang: mid woes
Not easily may mortal lips speak fair.

CHORUS.

Lo where she cometh from beneath the roofs: 665
In season for thy tale appeareth she.

HANDMAID.

O all-afflicted, more than lips can say!
Queen, thou art slain—thou seest the light no more!
Unchilded, widowed, cityless—all-destroyed!

HECUBA.

No news this: 'tis but taunting me who knew. 670
But wherefore com'st thou bringing me this corpse,
Polyxena's, whose burial-rites, 'twas told,
By all Achaia's host were being sped?

HANDMAID.

She nothing knows: Polyxena—ah me!—
Still wails she, and the new woes graspeth not. 675

HECUBA.

O hapless I!—not—not the bacchant head
Of prophetess Cassandra bring'st thou hither?

HANDMAID.

Thou nam'st the living: but the dead—this dead,
Bewailest not,—look, the dead form is bared!

[*Uncovers the corpse.*]

Seems it not strange—worse than all boding fears? 680

HECUBA.

Ah me, my son!—I see Polydorus dead,
Whom in his halls I deemed the Thracian warded.
O wretch! it is my death—I am no more!

O my child, O my child!

Mine anguish shall thrill 685

Through a wail shrilling wild

In the ears of me still

Which pealed there but now from the throat of a
demon, a herald of ill.

HANDMAID.

Didst thou then know thy son's doom, hapless one?

HECUBA.

Beyond, beyond belief, new woes I see.

Ills upon ills throng one after other: 690

Never day shall pass by without tear, without sigh,
nor mine anguish refrain.

CHORUS.

Dread, O dread evils, hapless queen, we suffer.

HECUBA.

O child, O child of a grief-stricken mother !
By what fate didst thou die ?—in what doom dost thou
lie ?—of what man wast thou slain ?

HANDMAID.

I know not : on the sea-strand found I him.

HECUBA.

Cast up by the tide, or struck down by the spear in a
blood-reddened hand
On the smooth-levelled sand ? 700

HANDMAID.

The outsea surge in-breaking flung him up.

HECUBA.

Woe's me, I discern it, the vision that blasted my sight !
Neither flitted unheeded that black-winged phantom of
night,
Which I saw, which revealed that my son was no more
of the light.

CHORUS.

Who slew him ? Canst thou, dream-arreder, tell ?

HECUBA.

'Twas my friend, 'twas my guest, 'twas the Thracian
chariot-lord 710
To whose charge his grey father had given him to hide
and to ward.

CHORUS.

Oh, what wouldst say ?—slew him to keep the gold ?

HECUBA.

O horror unspeakable, nameless, beyond all wonder!—

Impious, unbearable!—Where are they, friendship
and truth?

O accursèd of men, lo, how hast thou carved asunder
His flesh!—how thy knife, when my child's limbs
quivered thereunder,

Hath slashed him and mangled, and thou wast un-
melted of ruth!

720

CHORUS.

O hapless, how a God, whose hand on thee
Is heavy, above all mortals heaps thee pain!

But lo, I see our master towering nigh, [725
Agamemnon: friends, henceforth hold we our peace.

Enter Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON.

Why stay'st thou, Hecuba, thy child to entomb
According to Talthybius' word to me
That of the Argives none should touch thy daughter?
Wherefore we let her be, and touch her not.

Yet loiterest thou, that wonder stirreth me. 730

I come to speed thee hence; for all things there
Are well wrought—if herein may aught be well.

Ha, who is this that by the tents I see?

What Trojan dead?—No Argive this, the robes
That shroud the body make report to me. 735

HECUBA (*aside*).¹

Hapless!—myself I name in naming thee—

¹ c.f. *Hen. VI*, Part I, Act v, iii, for a closely similar series of asides.

O Hecuba, what shall I do?—or fall
At the king's feet, or silent bear mine ills?

AGAMEMNON.

Wherefore on me dost turn thy back, and mourn,
Nor tellest what is done, and who is this? 740

HECUBA (*aside*).

But if, a slave and foe accounting me,
He thrust me from his knees, 'twere pang on pang. | ✓

AGAMEMNON.

No prophet born am I, to track the path
Of these thy musings, if I hear them not.

HECUBA (*aside*).

Lo, surely am I counting this man's heart 745
O'ermuch my foe, who is no foe at all.

AGAMEMNON.

Sooth, if thou wilt that nought hereof I know,
At one we are: I care not, I, to hear.

HECUBA (*aside*).

I cannot, save with help of him, avenge
My children—wherefore do I dally thus?
I must needs venture, or to win or lose:—
Agamemnon, I beseech thee by thy knees,
And by thy beard, and thy victorious hand—

750

AGAMEMNON.

What matter seekest thou? Wouldst have thy days
Free henceforth? Sooth, thy boon is lightly won. 755

HECUBA.

No—no! Avenge me of mine adversary,
And I will welcome lifelong bondage then.

AGAMEMNON.

But to what championship dost summon me?

HECUBA.

To nought of all whereof thou dreamest, king. [760
Seest thou this corpse, for which my tears rain down?

AGAMEMNON.

I see,—yet what shall come I cannot tell.

HECUBA.

Him once I bare, and carried 'neath my zone.

AGAMEMNON.

One of thy sons is this, O sorrow-crushed?

HECUBA.

Nay, not of Priam's sons by Ilium slain.

AGAMEMNON.

How? didst thou bear another more than these? 765

HECUBA.

Yea—to my grief, meseems: thou seest him here.

AGAMEMNON.

Yet where was he what time the city fell?

HECUBA.

Dreading his death his father sent him thence.

AGAMEMNON.

And whither drew him from the rest apart ?

HECUBA.

Unto this land, where dead hath he been found. 770

AGAMEMNON.

To Polymestor, ruler of the land ?

HECUBA.

Yea—sent in charge of thrice-accursed gold.

AGAMEMNON.

And of whom slain, and lighting on what doom ?

HECUBA.

Of whom save one ?—that Thracian friend slew him.

AGAMEMNON.

O wretch !—for that he lusted for the gold ? 775

HECUBA.

Even so, when Phrygia's fall was known of him.

AGAMEMNON.

Where found'st thou him ?—or who hath brought thy
dead ?

HECUBA.

She there : upon the strand she chanced on him.

AGAMEMNON.

Seeking him, or on other task employed ?

HECUBA.

Sea-brine she sought, to lave Polyxena. 780

AGAMEMNON.

So then this guest-friend slew and cast him forth.

HECUBA.

Yea, on the sea to drift, his flesh thus hacked.

AGAMEMNON.

O woe is thee for thine unmeasured pains !

HECUBA.

'Tis death—there is no deeper depth of woe.

AGAMEMNON.

Alas, was woman e'er so fortune-crost ? 785

HECUBA.

None, except thou wouldst name Misfortune's self.

But for what cause I bow thy knees to clasp,

Hear :—if my righteous due my sufferings seem

To thee, I am content : if not, do thou

Avenge me on that impious, impious friend, 790

Who neither feared the powers beneath the earth,

Nor those on high, but wrought most impious deed,—

Who ofttimes at my table ate and drank,

For welcome foremost in my count of friends,

Having all dues, yea, all his need forestalled,¹— 795

¹ Another interpretation—

“ Yet scheming this the while ! ”

Slew him, nor in his thoughts of murder found
 Room for a grave, but cast him mid the sea.
 And I—a slave I may be, haply weak ;
 Yet are the Gods strong, and their ruler strong,
 Even Law ; for by this Law we know Gods are, 800
 And live, and make division of wrong and right :
 And if this at thy bar be disannulled,
 And they shall render not account which slay
 Guests, or dare rifle the Gods' holy things,
 Then among men is there no righteousness. 805
 This count then shameful ; have respect to me ;
 Pity me :—like a painter so draw back,¹
 Scan me, pore on my portraiture of woes.
 A queen was I, time was, but now thy slave ;
 Crowned with fair sons once, childless now and old, 810
 Cityless, lone, of mortals wretchedest.
 Woe for me !—whither wouldst withdraw thy foot ?
 Meseems I shall not speed—O hapless I !
 Wherefore, O wherefore, at all other lore
 Toil men, as needeth, and make eager quest, 815
 Yet Suasion, the unrivalled queen of men,
 Nor price we pay, nor make ado to learn her
 Unto perfection, so a man might sway
 His fellows as he would, and win his ends ?
 How then shall any hope good days henceforth ? 820

¹ This transition will not appear abrupt and artificial if we suppose that Agamemnon, apprehensive of the obligation thrust upon him, makes a movement to draw back, which Hecuba, with the quick wit of desperation, converts to a simile which arrests him till l. 812, when she is driven to make a more direct appeal to his sense of honour. Note, that she uses just such words as a Greek painter might have used in pointing out to a patron the merits of his work—
 “ ἰδοῦ, κἀνάθρησκον οἱ ἔχει καλά.”

So many sons—none left me any more !
 Myself mid shame a spear-thrall ruin-spel ;—
 Yon smoke o'er Troy upsoaring in my sight !
 Yet—yet—'twere unavailing plea perchance
 To cast Love's shield before me—yet be it said : 825
 Lo, at thy very side my child is couched,
 Cassandra, whom the Phrygians called the Inspired :—
 Those nights of love, hath their memorial perished ?
 Or for the lovingkindness of the couch
 What thank shall my child have, or I for her ? 830
 For of the darkness and the night's love-spells
 Cometh on men the chiefest claim for thank.
 Hearken now, hearken : seest thou this dead boy ?
 Doing him right, to thine own marriage-kin
 Shalt thou do right. One plea more lack I yet :— 835
 O that I had a voice in these mine arms
 And hands and hair and pacings of my feet,
 By art of Dædalus lent, or of a God,
 That all together to thy knees might cling
 Weeping, and pressing home pleas manifold ! 840
 O my lord, mightiest light to Hellas' sons,
 Hearken, O lend thine hand to avenge the aged ;
 What though a thing of nought she be, yet hear !
 For 'tis the good man's part to champion right,
 And everywhere and aye to smite the wrong. 845

CHORUS.

Strange, strange, how all cross-chances hap to men !
 These laws shift landmarks even of friendship's ties,¹

¹ The laws of right and wrong, and the obligation to avenge the blood of kin, compel Hecuba to ally herself with Agamemnon, her late enemy, against Polymestor, her late friend.

Turning to friends the bitterest of foes,
Setting at enmity the erstwhile loving.

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AGAMEMNON.

I am stirred to pity, Hecuba, both of thee, 850
Thy son, thy fortune, and thy suppliant hand ;
And for the Gods' and justice' sake were fain
Thine impious guest should taste for this thy vengeance,
So means were found thy cause to speed, while I
Seem not unto the host to plot this death 855
For Thracia's king for thy Kassandra's sake.
For herein is mine heart disquieted :—
This very man the host account their friend,
The dead their foe : that dear he is to thee
Is nought to them, nor part have these in him. 860
Wherefore take thought : in me thou hast one fain
To share thy toil, and swift to lend thee aid,
But slow to face the Achaians' murmurings.

Polygm
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HECUBA.

Ah, among mortals is there no man free ! ✓
To lucre or to fortune is he slave : 865
The city's rabble or the laws' impeachment
Constrains him into paths his soul abhors.
But since thou fear'st, dost overrate the crowd,
Even I will set thee free from this thy dread.
Be privy thou, what ill soe'er I plot 870
For my son's slayer, but share not the deed.
If tumult mid the Achaians rise, or cry
Of rescue, when the Thracian feels my vengeance,
Thou check them, not in seeming for my sake.
For all else, fear not : I will shape all well. 875

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AGAMEMNON.

How? what wouldst do? Wouldst in thy wrinkled hand
A dagger clutch, and yon barbarian slay?—
With poisons do the deed, or with what help?
What arm shall aid thee? whence wilt win thee friends?

HECUBA.

These tents a host of Trojan women hide. 880

AGAMEMNON.

The captives meanest thou, Greek hunters' prey?

HECUBA.

By these will I avenge me on my slayer.

AGAMEMNON.

How?—women gain the mastery over men?

HECUBA.

Mighty are numbers: joined with craft, resistless.

AGAMEMNON.

Ay, mighty, yet misprize I womankind. 885

HECUBA.

What? did not women slay Aigyptus' sons?—

The males of Lemnos wholly extirpate?

Yet be it so: forbear to reason this.

But to this woman give thou through the host

Safe passage. [890

(*To a servant*) Thou, draw nigh our Thracian guest,
Say, "Hecuba, late Queen of Ilium,

Calls thee on thy behoof no less than hers,
 Thy sons withal ; for these must also hear
 Her words." The burial of Polyxena
 Late-slaughtered, Agamemnon, thou delay : 895
 So sister joined with brother in one flame,
 A mother's double grief, shall be entombed.

AGAMEMNON.

So shall it be : yet, might the host but sail,
 No power had I to grant this grace to thee :
 But, seeing God sends no fair-following winds, 900
 Needs must we tarry watching idle sails.
 Now fair befall : for all men's weal is this,—
 Each several man's, and for the state,—that ill
 Betide the bad, prosperity the good.

[*Exit Agamemnon.*

CHORUS.

(*Str. 1*)

O my fatherland, Ilium, thou art named no more
 Mid burgs unspoiled,
 Such a battle-cloud lightening spears enshrouds thee o'er,
 All round thee coiled ! [910
 Thou art piteously shorn of thy brows' tower-diadem,
 And smirched with stain
 Of the reek ; and thy streetways—my feet shall not
 tread them,
 Ah me, again !

(*Ant. 1*)

At the midnight my doom lighted on me, when sleep shed
 O'er eyes sweet rain,
 When from sacrifice-dance and from hushed songs on
 his bed

My lord had lain,

And the spear on the wall was uphung, for watchman's
ken 920

Saw near nor far
Overtrampling the Ilian plains those sea-borne men,
That host of war.
(*Str.* 2)

I was ranging the braids of mine hair 'neath soft snood-
fold :

On mine eyes thrown
Were the rays from the limitless¹ sheen, the mirror-
gold,
Ere I sank down
To my rest on the couch ;—but a tumult's tempest-
blast
Swept up the street,
And a battle-cry thundered—"Ye sons of Greeks, on
fast ! 930

Be the castles of Troy overthrown, that home at last
May hail your feet !"
(*Ant.* 2)

From my dear bed, my lost bed, I sprang, like Dorian
maid

But mantle-veiled,
And to Artemis' altar I clung—woe's me, I prayed
In vain, and wailed.
And my lord I beheld lying dead ; and I was borne
O'er deep salt sea,
Looking back upon Troy, by the ship from Ilium torn
As she sped on the Hellas-ward path : then woe-forlorn
I swooned,—ah me !— [940

¹ The Greek word, for which I cannot find any English equivalent in this sense, expresses that apparent absence of any bounding surface in a perfect mirror, which has sometimes betrayed the unwary into walking through such.

(Epode)

Upon Helen the sister of Zeus' sons hurling back,
And on Paris, fell shepherd of Ida, curses black,
Who from mine home
By their bridal had reft me—'twas bridal none, but
wrack 950
Devil-wrought :—to her fatherland home o'er yon sea-
track
Ne'er may she come !

Enter Polymestor with his two little sons attended by a guard of Thracian spearmen.

POLYMESTOR.

Priam of men most dear !—and dearest thou,
O Hecuba, I weep beholding thee,
Thy city, and thine offspring slain so late. 955
Nought is there man may trust, nor high repute,
Nor hope that weal shall not be turned to woe ;
But the Gods all confound, hurled forth and back,
Turmoiling them, that we through ignorance
May worship them :—what skills it to make moan 960
For this, outrunning evils none the more ?
But if mine absence thou dost chide, forbear ;
For in the mid-Thrace tracts afar was I
When thou cam'st hither : soon as I returned,
At point was I to hasten forth mine home ; 965
When lo, for this same end thine handmaid came
Telling a tale whose tidings winged mine haste.

HECUBA.

I shame to look thee in the face, who lie,
O Polymestor, in such depth of ills.

Thou sawest me in weal : shame's thrall I am, 970
Found in such plight wherein I am this day.
I cannot look on thee with eyes undrooped.
Yet count it not as evil-will to thee,
Polymestor ; therebeside is custom's bar
That women look not in the eyes of men. 975

POLYMESTOR.

No marvel :—but what need hast thou of me ?
For what cause from mine home hast sped my feet ?

HECUBA.

A secret of mine own I fain would tell
To thee and thine. I pray thee, bid thy guards
Aloof from these pavilions to withdraw. 980

POLYMESTOR.

Depart ye, for this solitude is safe. [*Exeunt guards.*
My friend art thou, well-willed to me this host
Achaian. Now behoves thee to declare
Wherein the prosperous must render help
To friends afflicted : lo, prepared am I. 985

HECUBA.

First, of the son whom in thine halls thou hast,
Polydorus, of mine hands, and of his sire's—
Liveth he ?—I will ask thee then the rest.

POLYMESTOR.

Surely : as touching him thy lot is fair.

HECUBA.

Dear friend, how well thou speak'st and worthy thee ! 990

POLYMESTOR.

Prithee, what next art fain to learn of me ?

HECUBA.

If me, his mother, he remembereth ?

POLYMESTOR.

Yea—fain had come to thee in secret hither.

HECUBA.

Is the gold safe, wherewith from Troy he came ?

POLYMESTOR.

Safe—warded in mine halls in any wise.

995

HECUBA.

Safe keep it : covet not thy neighbours' goods.

POLYMESTOR.

Nay, lady : joy be mine of that I have !

HECUBA.

Know'st what I fain would tell thee and thy sons ?

POLYMESTOR.

I know not : this thy word shall signify.

HECUBA.

Be it sweet to thee as thou to me art dear !

1000

POLYMESTOR.

But what imports my sons and me to know ?

HECUBA.

Gold—ancient vaults of gold of Priam's line.

POLYMESTOR.

This is it thou art fain to tell thy son ?

HECUBA.

Yea, by thy mouth : thou art a righteous man.

POLYMESTOR.

What needeth then the presence of my sons ? 1005

HECUBA.

Better they knew, if haply thou shouldst die.

POLYMESTOR.

Well hast thou said : yea, 'twere the wiser way.

HECUBA.

Dost know where stood Athênê's Trojan fane ?

POLYMESTOR.

There?—is the gold there?—and the token, what ?

HECUBA.

A black rock from the earth's face jutting forth. 1010

POLYMESTOR.

Hast aught beside to tell me of that hoard ?

HECUBA.

Some jewels I brought forth with me—wouldst keep
these ?

POLYMESTOR.

Where?—where?—beneath thy raiment, or in hiding?

HECUBA.

In yon tents, safe beneath a heap of spoils.

POLYMESTOR.

Safe?—there?—Achaian ships empale us round. 1015

HECUBA.

Inviolable are the captive women's tents.

POLYMESTOR.

Within is all safe? Be they void of men?

HECUBA.

Within is no Achaian, only we.

Enter the tents,—for fain the Argives are

To unmoor the ships for homeward flight from Troy,—

[1020

That, all well done, thou mayst with thy sons fare

To where thou gav'st a home unto my child.

Hecuba and Polymestor with Children enter the tent.

CHORUS.

Not yet is the penalty paid, but thy time is at hand,

As who reeleth adown an abyss wherein foothold is
none

Slant-slipping, from sweet life hurled, for the life
thou hast ta'en. [1029

For wherever it cometh to pass that the rightful demand

Of justice's claim and the laws of the Gods be at one,

Then is ruinous bane for the sinner, O ruinous bane!

It shall mock thee, thy wayfaring's hope ; to the Unseen
Land,

To the place of the dead hath it drawn thee, O
wretch undone !

By the hand not of warriors, thou hero, shalt thou
be slain.

POLYMESTOR (*within*).

Ah, I am blinded of mine eyes' light—wretch ! 1035

CHORUS.

Heard ye the yell of yonder Thracian, friends ?

POLYMESTOR (*within*).

Ah me, my children !—ah the awful murder !

CHORUS.

Friends, strange grim work is wrought in yonder tent.

POLYMESTOR (*within*).

Surely by swift feet shall ye not escape !

My blows shall rive this dwelling's inmost parts ! 1040

CHORUS.

Lo, crasheth there swift bolt of giant hand.

Shall we burst in ?—the peril summoneth us

To help of Hecuba and the Trojan dames.

Enter Hecuba.

HECUBA.

Smite on—spare not—ay, batter down the doors !

Ne'er shalt thou set bright vision in thine orbs, 1045

Nor living see thy sons whom I have slain.

CHORUS.

Hast vanquished ?—overcome thy Thracian guest,
Lady ?—hast done the deed thou threatenedst ?

HECUBA.

Him shalt thou straightway see before the tents,
Blind, pacing with blind aimless-stumbling feet, 1050
And his two children's corpses, whom I slew
With Trojan heroines' help : now hath he paid me
The vengeance-dues. There comes he forth, thou
seest.

I from his path will step ; the seething rage
Of yonder Thracian monster will I shun. 1055

Enter Polymestor.

POLYMESTOR.

Ah me, whitherward shall I go ?—where stand ?

Where find me a mooring-place ?

Must I prowl on their track with foot and with hand

As a mountain-beast should pace ?

Or to this side or that shall I turn me, for vengeance
pursuing 1060

The slaughterous hags of Troy which have wrought
mine undoing ?

Foul daughters of Phrygia, murderesses

Accursèd, in what deep-hidden recesses

Are ye cowering in flight ?

O couldst thou but heal these eye-pits gory—

O couldst thou but heal the blind, and restore me,

O Sun, thy light !

Hist—hist—their stealthy footfalls creep—

I hear them—whither shall this foot leap, 1070
That their flesh and their bones I may gorge, and may
slake me

With their blood, and a banquet of wild beasts make me,
 Requiting their outrage well
 With grimmer revenge?—Woe! where am I
 borne
 Forsaking my fenceless babes to be torn
 Of the bacchanals of hell,
 Butchered and cast away for the dogs' blood-boultered
 prey

On a desolate mountain-fell?
 Ah, where shall I stand?—whither go?—where
 rest? [1080
 As a ship furls sail that hath havenward pressed,
 I would dart into that death-haunted lair,
 I would shroud my babes in my linen vest,
 I would guard them there!

CHORUS.

Wretch! wreaked on thee are ills intolerable:
 Foul deeds thou didst, and awful penalty
 A God hath laid on thee with heavy hand.

POLYMESTOR.

What ho! spear-brandishers, nation arrayed in warrior's
 weed!

Thracians possessed of the War-god, lords of the gallant
 steed! 1090

What ho, ye Achaïans!—Atreus' seed!

Rescue! Rescue! I raise the cry.

O come, in the name of the Gods draw nigh!

Hears any man?—wherefore delay?—will no man help
 me nor heed?

Of women undone, destroyed, am I—
 The women of Troy's captivity.

Horrors are wrought on me—horrors! Woe for the felon deed!

Whitherward shall I turn me? Whitherward fare?

Shall I leap as on wings to the height of the heaven,
to the mansions of air, 1100

To Orion or Sirius, fearful-gleaming

With the burning flames from his eyes out-streaming,

Or plunge to the blackness of darkness, to Hades' gorge in despair?

CHORUS.

Small blame, if he which suffereth heavier woes
Than man may bear, should flee his wretched life.

Enter Agamemnon.

AGAMEMNON.

Hearing a shout I came; for in no whispers
The mountain-rock's child Echo through the host 1110
Cried, waking tumult. Knew we not the towers
Of Phrygia by the spear of Greeks had fallen,
No little panic had this clangour roused.

POLYMESTOR.

Dear friend—for, Agamemnon, 'tis thy voice
I hear and know—see'st thou what I endure? 1115

AGAMEMNON.

Ha, wretched Polymestor, who hath marred thee?
Who dashed with blood thine eyes, and blinded thee?—
Slew these thy sons? Sooth, against thee and thine
Grim was his fury, whosoe'er it was.

POLYMESTOR.

Hecuba, with the captive woman-throng, 1120
Destroyed me—nay, destroyed not—O, far worse !

AGAMEMNON.

What say'st thou ?—Thine the deed, as he hath said ?
Thou, Hecuba, dare this thing impossible !

POLYMESTOR.

Ha ! what say'st thou ?—and is she nigh at hand ?
Tell where is she, that I may in mine hands 1125
Clutch her and rend, and bathe her flesh in blood.

AGAMEMNON (*holding him back*).

Ho thou, what ails thee ?

POLYMESTOR.

By the Gods I pray thee,
Unhand me—loose my frenzied hand on her !

AGAMEMNON.

Forbear : cast out the savage from thine heart.
Speak, let me hear first thee, then her, and judge 1130
Justly for what cause thus thou sufferest.

POLYMESTOR.

Yea, I will speak. 'Twas Priam's youngest son
Polydorus, Hecuba's child—from Troy to me
Him his sire sent to nurture in mine halls,
Misdoubting, ye may guess, the fall of Troy. 1035
Him slew I. For what cause I slew him, hear :
Mark how I dealt well, wisely, prudently :—

I feared their son might, left alive thy foe,
Gather Troy's remnant and repeople her,
And, hearing how a Priamid lived, Achaia 1140
To Phrygia-land again should bring her host ;
Then should they trample down these plains of Thrace
In foray, and the ills that wasted us
But now, O king, should on Troy's neighbours fall.
And Hecuba, being ware of her son's death, 1145
With this tale lured me, that she would reveal
Hid treasures of Priam's line in Troy
Of gold. Me only with my sons she leads
Within the tents, that none beside might know.
Bowing the knee there sat I in their midst ; 1150
While, on my left hand some, some on the right,
As by a friend, forsooth, Troy's daughters sat
Many : the web of our Edonian loom
Praised they, uplifting to the light my cloak ;
And some my Thracian lance admiring took, 1155
And stripped me so alike of spear and shield.
As many as were mothers, loud in praise
Dandled my babes, that from their sire afar
They might be borne, from hand to hand passed on.
Then, after such smooth speech,—couldst thou be-
lieve?— 1160
Suddenly snatching daggers from their robes,
They stab my sons ; and others all as one
In foemen's fashion gripped mine hands and feet,
And held : and, when I fain would aid my sons,
If I essayed to raise my face, by the hair 1165
They held me down : if I would move mine hands,
For the host of women, wretch ! I nought prevailed.
And last—O outrage than all outrage worse !—
A hideous deed they wrought : for of mine eyes

These wretched eyeballs—grasping their brooch-pins—
[1170

They stab, they flood with gore. Then through the
tents

Fleeing they went. Up from the earth I leapt,
And like a wild beast chased the blood-stained hounds,
Groping o'er all the wall, like tracking huntsman,
Smiting and battering. All for my zeal's sake 1175

For thee, I suffered this, who slew thy foe,
Agamemnon. Wherefore needeth many words?

Whoso ere now hath spoken ill of women,
Or speaketh now, or shall hereafter speak,
All this in one word will I close and say:— 1180

Nor sea nor land doth nurture such a breed:
He knoweth, who hath converse with them most.

CHORUS.

Be nowise reckless, nor, for thine own ills,
Include in this thy curse all womankind.
For some, yea many of us, deserve not blame,¹ 1185
Though some by vice of blood count midst the bad.

HECUBA.

Agamemnon, never should this thing have been,
That words with men should more avail than deeds,
But good deeds should with reasonings good be paired,

¹ I venture to propose οὐκ for εἶσ' in 1185. In a copy from a cursive MS., especially one like Harl. 5724, in which the contracted εἰ and οὐ are so similar, εἶσ' would be more likely to have crept in for οὐκ, than τῶν for μὴ (1186), as suggested by Paley; and the Chorus would be more likely to claim that the *majority* of their sisters were good, than that they were bad.

And caitiff deed be ranged by baseless plea, 1190
And none avail to gloze injustice o'er.
There be whose craft such art hath perfected ;
Yet cannot they be cunning to the end :
Foully they perish : never one hath 'scaped.
Such prelude hath my speech as touching thee. 1195
Now with plea answering plea to him I turn :—
To spare the Greeks, say'st thou, a twice-toiled task,
For Agamemnon's sake thou slew'st my son.
Villain of villains, when, when could thy race,
Thy brute race, be a friend unto the Greeks ? 1200
Never. And, prithee, whence this fervent zeal
To serve his cause ?—didst look to wed his daughter ?
Art of his kin ?—Or what thy private end ?
Or were they like to sail again and waste [1205
Thy crops ? Whom think'st thou to convince hereby ?
That gold—hadst thou the will to tell the truth—
Murdered my son : that, and thy greed of gain.
For, hearken : why, when all went well with Troy,
When yet her ramparts girt the city round,
And Priam lived, and triumphed Hector's spear, 1210
Why not then, if thou fain wouldst earn kings' thanks,
When in mine halls ye had my son and fostered,
Slay him, or living bring him to the Greeks ?
But, soon as in the light we walked no more,
And the smoke's token proved our town the foe's, 1215
Thou slew'st the guest that came unto thine hearth.
Nay more, hear now how thou art villain proved :
Thou oughtest, if thou wert the Achaians' friend,
Have brought the gold thou dar'st not call thine own,
But for him held in trust, to these impoverished 1220
And long time exiled from their fatherland.
But thou not yet canst ope thine heart to uncloze

Thy grip ; thy miser-clutch keeps it at home.
Yet hadst thou, as behoved thee, reared my son
And saved alive, thine had been fair renown. 1225
For in adversity the good are friends
Most true : prosperity hath friends unsought.
Hadst thou lacked money, and his lot been fair,
A treasury deep my son had been to thee :
But now thou hast not him unto thy friend ; 1230
Gone is the gold's avail, thy sons are gone,—
And this thy plight ! Now unto thee I say,
Agamemnon, if thou help him, base thou showest.
The godless, false to whom he owed fair faith,
The impious host unrighteous shalt thou comfort. 1235
Thou joyest in the wicked, shall we say,
If such thou be—but on my lords I rail not.

CHORUS.

Lo, how the good cause giveth evermore
To men occasion for good argument.

AGAMEMNON.

It likes me not to judge on others' wrongs ; 1240
Yet needs I must, for shame it were to take
This cause into mine hands, and then thrust by.
But,—wouldst thou know my thought,—not for my sake,
Nor the Achaians', didst thou slay thy guest,
But even to keep that gold within thine halls. 1245
In this ill plight thou speak'st to serve thine ends.
Haply with you guest-murder is as nought,
But to us which be Greeks foul shame is this.
How can I uncondemned adjudge thee guiltless ?
I cannot. Forasmuch as thou hast dared 1250
To do foul deeds, even drain thy bitter cup.

POLYMESTOR.

Woe's me !—by a woman-slave o'ercome, meseems,
'Neath vengeance of the viler must I bow !

HECUBA.

Is it not just, if thou hast vileness wrought ?

POLYMESTOR.

Woe for my babes and for mine eyes !—ah wretch ! 1255

HECUBA.

Griev'st thou ?—and I ?—dost deem my son's loss sweet ?

POLYMESTOR.

Thou joyest triumphing over me, thou fiend !

HECUBA.

Should I not joy for vengeance upon thee ?

POLYMESTOR.

Ah, soon thou shalt not, when the outsea surge—

HECUBA.

Shall bear me to the coasts of Hellas-land ? 1260

POLYMESTOR.

Nay, but shall whelm thee fallen from the mast.

HECUBA.

Yea ?—forced of whom to take the leap of death ?

POLYMESTOR.

Thyself shalt climb the ship's mast with thy feet.

HECUBA.

So?—and with shoulders winged, or in what guise?

POLYMESTOR.

A dog with fire-red eyes shalt thou become. 1265

HECUBA.

How know'st thou of the changing of my shape?

POLYMESTOR.

This Dionysus told, the Thracian seer.

HECUBA.

But nought foretold to thee of these thine ills?

POLYMESTOR.

Nay; else with guile thou ne'er hadst trapped me thus.

HECUBA.

There shall I die, or live my full life out? 1270

POLYMESTOR.

Die shalt thou: and thy grave shall bear a name—

HECUBA.

Accordant to my shape?—or what wilt say?

POLYMESTOR.

The wretched Dog's Grave, sign to seafarers.

HECUBA.

Nought reck I, seeing thou hast felt my vengeance.

POLYMESTOR.

Yea, and thy child *Kassandra* too must die. 1275

HECUBA.

A scorn and spitting!—back on thee I hurl it.

POLYMESTOR.

Slay her shall this king's wife, a houseward grim.

HECUBA.

Never so mad may *Tyndareus'* daughter be!

POLYMESTOR.

Yea—slay him too, upswinging high the axe.

AGAMEMNON.

Ho, fellow, ravest thou? Dost court thy bane? 1280

POLYMESTOR.

Slay on: a bath of blood in *Argos* waits thee.

AGAMEMNON.

Haste, henchmen, hale him from my sight perforce.

POLYMESTOR.

Art galled to hear?

AGAMEMNON.

Set curb upon his mouth!

POLYMESTOR.

Ay, gag : my say is said.

AGAMEMNON.

Make speed, make speed,
And on some desert island cast him forth, 1285
Seeing his bold mouth's insolence passeth thus.
Hecuba, hapless, fare thou on, entomb
Thy corpses twain. Draw near, ye dames of Troy,
To your lords' tents, for I discern a breeze
Upspringing, home to waft us, even now. 1290
Fair voyage be ours to Hellas, fair the plight
Wherein, from these toils freed, we find our homes.

CHORUS.

To the tents, O friends, to the haven fare ;
The yoke of thraldom our necks must bear.
Fate knows not pity, fate will not spare. 1295
[*Exeunt omnes.*]

ION.

ARGUMENT.

IN the days when Erechtheus ruled over Athens, Apollo wrought violence to the king's young daughter Kreusa. And she, having born a son, left him, by reason of her fear and shame, in the cave wherein the God had humbled her. But Apollo cared for him, and caused the babe to be brought to Delphi, even to his temple. Therein was the child nurtured, and ministered in the courts of the God's house. And in process of time Erechtheus died, and left no son nor daughter save Kreusa, and evil days came upon Athens, that she was hard bestead in war. Then Xuthus, a chief of the Achaian folk, fought for her, and prevailed against her Eubæan enemies, and for guerdon of victory received the princess Kreusa to wife, and so became king-consort in Athens. But to these twain was no child born; so, after many years, they journeyed to Delphi to enquire of the oracle of Apollo touching issue. And there the God ordered all things so that the lost was found, and an heir was given to the royal house of Athens. Yet, through the blind haste of mortals, and their little faith, was the son well-nigh slain by the mother, and the mother by the son.

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

HERMES, *the messenger of the Gods.*

ION, *son of Apollo and Kreusa.*

KREUSA, *Queen of Athens, Daughter of Erechtheus, and wife of Xuthus.*

XUTHUS, *an Achaian chief, king-consort of Athens.*

OLD SERVANT, *(of Erechtheus formerly, then of Kreusa).*

SERVANT *(of Xuthus).*

PYTHIA, *the Prophetess of the temple.*

ATHENE, *Patron-goddess of Athens.*

CHORUS, *consisting of Handmaids attendant on Kreusa.*

Attendants, priests, guards, and Delphian citizens.

SCENE :—At Delphi, in the fore-court of the temple of
Pythian Apollo, who is called also Phœbus, and Loxias.
The great altar of sacrifice stands in the centre.

ION.

Enter Hermes.

HERMES.

ATLAS, whose brazen shoulders wear the base
Of heaven, the ancient home of Gods, begat
Of a certain Goddess¹ Maia, which bare me,
Hermes, to Zeus most high, heaven's messenger.
Now to this Delphian land I come, where Phœbus 5
Hath at earth's navel his prophetic seat
Revealing things that are and things to be.
There is a famous city of the Greeks,
Named Burg of Pallas of the Golden Spear.
There Phœbus forced Erechtheus' child Kreusa 10
Where the north-facing rocks, beneath the Mount
Of Pallas in the Athenian land, are called
The Long Cliffs by the lords of Attica.
Nought knew her sire—for this was Phœbus' will—
The burden 'neath her heart; but in due time 15
She travailed in his halls; and brought the babe
Unto the selfsame cave wherein the God
Had humbled her, and left it there to die
In the fair-rounded hollow of an ark,

¹ Pleione, daughter of Ocean.

Still keeping the tradition of her race 20
 And earth-born Erichthonius,¹ by whom
 Zeus' Daughter set for warders of his life
 Two serpents, ere to the Agrauid maids
 She gave the babe to nurse. For this cause there
 The Erechtheids use to hang about their babes 25
 Serpents of gold. Yea, broidery from her robe
 She tied to her babe, and left him, as for death.
 Then did my brother Phœbus ask me this :
 " Go, brother, to the earth-born folk of Athens
 The glorious,—for thou know'st Athênê's burg,— 30
 And from the rock-cleft take a babe new-born,
 With cradle and with swaddling-bands withal,
 And bear to Delphi, to mine oracle,
 And set him at my temple's entering-in.
 All else be mine : for this—that thou mayst know,— 35
 Is my son." For a grace to Loxias
 My brother, took I up the woven ark,
 And bare, and on the basement of this fane
 I set him, opening first the cradle's lid
 With-woven, that the boy might so be seen. 40
 And, as the sun drove forth his chariot, passed
 A priestess into the prophetic shrine,
 Who, casting eyes upon the wordless babe,
 marvelled that any Delphian maid should dare

1 Erichthonius was the son of Earth. Athênê placed the newborn babe, with two serpents, in a chest, which she delivered to the daughters of Agrauius, wife of Kekrops, forbidding them to open it. They disobeyed, and, at the sight of the serpents, became mad through terror, and leapt to their death down the cliffs of the Acropolis (see ll. 265-274). After death they haunted the spot, dancing upon the cliff's brink beneath the moon, while Pan piped to them from his cave far below. See Chorus-song, ll. 491-502.

Into the God's house fling her child of shame, 45
And o'er the holy pale in zeal had thrust ;
But pity banished cruelty : yea, the God
Wrought that the boy be not cast forth his fane.
So took she him and nursed, nor knew the sire
Was Phœbus, nor the reckling's mother knew ; 50
Nor knows the boy who brought him into life.
So did the youngling round the altars sport
That fed him. When to manhood waxed his frame,
The Delphians made him treasurer of the God,
And steward of all trust ; and in the fane 55
He liveth to this day a hallowed life.
But she, Kreusa, that had born the lad,
Was wed to Xuthus, by such hap as this :—
A surge of war 'twixt Athens rose and them
That in Eubœa hold Chalkidikê, 60
Wherein triumphant toiled that chieftain's spear,
And won Kreusa for his guerdon bride ;
An alien he, of Aiulus sprung and Zeus,
Achaian born : but after wedded years
He and his wife be childless. For this cause 65
To this shrine of Apollo have they come,
Yearning for seed. Now Loxias guides their fate
To this, nor hath forgotten, as might seem.
He shall give Xuthus, when he entereth,
His own child, saying to him, " Lo, thy son," 70
That the lad, coming home, made known may be
Unto Kreusa, Loxias' deed abide
Unknown, and so the child may have his right.
And Ion shall he cause him to be called
Through Greece, the founder of an Asian realm. 75
Now to yon hollow bay-embowered I go
To watch how destiny dealeth with the lad.

For yonder see I Loxias' child come forth
 To make the temple-portals gay with boughs
 Of bay. And by the name that he shall bear, 80
 Ion, do I first name him of the Gods. [Exit.

Enter Ion, followed by a throng of Delphian worshippers.

ION.

Lo, yonder the Sun-god is turning to earthward his
 splendour-blazing

Chariot of light ;

And the stars from the firmament flee from the fiery
 arrows chasing,

To the sacred night :

And the crests of Parnassus untrodden are flaming and
 flushed, as with yearning

Of welcome to far-flashing wheels with the glory of
 daylight returning

To mortal sight.

To the roof-ridge of Phœbus the fume of the incense of
 Araby burning

As a bird taketh flight. 90

On the tripod most holy is seated the Delphian
 Maiden

Chanting to children of Hellas the wild cries, laden
 With doom, from the lips of Apollo that ring.

Delphians, Phœbus's priesthood-train,

Unto Castaly's silvery-swirling spring

Pass ye, and cleanse with the pure spray-rain

Your bodies, or ever ye enter his fane.

Set a watch on the door of your lips ; be there heard

Nothing but good in the secret word

That ye murmur to them whose hearts be stirred 100

To seek to his shrine, that they seek not in vain.
 And I in the toil that is mine—mine now,
 And from childhood up,—with the bay's young bough,
 And with wreathèd garlands holy, will cleanse

The portals of Phœbus ; with dew from the spring
 Will I sprinkle his pavement, and chase far thence

With the shaft from the string
 The flocks of the birds : the defilers shall flee

From his offerings holy. Nor mother is mine
 Neither father : his temple hath nurtured me, 110
 And I serve his shrine.

(*Str.*)

Come, branch in thy freshness yet blowing,

God's minister, loveliest bay,

Over the altar-steps glide.

In the gardens immortal, beside

His temple, hath burgeoned thy pride,

Where the sacred waters are flowing

Through a veil of the myrtle spray,

A fountain that leapeth aye

O'er thy tresses divine to pour. 120

I wave thee o'er Phœbus' floor

As the sun's wing soars sudden-glowing.

Such service is mine each day.

O Healer, O Healer-king,

Let blessing on blessing upring

Unto Lêto's Son as I sing.

(*Ant.*)

'Tis my glory, the service I render

In thy portals, O Phœbus, to thee !

I honour thy prophet-shrine. 130

Proud labour is mine—it is thine !

I am thrall to the Gods divine :

Not to men, but Immortals, I tender
 My bondage ; 'tis glorious and free :
 Never faintness shall fall upon me.
 For my father thee, Phœbus, I praise,
 Who hast nurtured me all my days :
 My begetter, mine help, my defender
 This temple's Phœbus shall be.
 O Healer, O Healer-king, 140
 Let blessing on blessing upring
 Unto Lêto's Son as I sing.

But—for now from the toil I refrain
 Of the bay-boughs softly trailing,—
 From the pitchers of gold shall I rain
 The drops from the breast unfailing
 Of the earth that spring
 Where the foambell-ring
 Round Castaly's fount goeth sailing.
 It rains, it rains from my fingers fast,
 From the hands of the undefiled wide-cast. 150
 O that to Phœbus for ever so
 I might render service, nor respite know,
 Except unto happier lot I go !

Flights of birds are seen approaching.

Ho there, ho there !
 Even now are they flocking, the fowl of the air,
 On Parnassus forsaking each crag-hung lair.
 Touch not, I warn ye, the temple's coping,
 Nor the roofs with the glistening gold slant-sloping.
 Ha, my bow shall o'ertake thee again from afar,
 Zeus' herald, whose talons victorious war
 On the birds that strongest are. 160

Lo, yonder the pinion-oars come rowing
 Of another, a swan, to the altar :—away !
 Speed hence thy feet in the dawn rose-glowing ;
 Else Phœbus's lyre, that accordeth its lay
 To thy notes, from death shall redeem not thee.

Waft onward thy wings of snow :
 Light down on the Delian mere oversea,
 Lest the blood-rush choke, if thou do not so,
 Thy sweet throat's melody.

Ha, what new fowl cometh hitherward winging ? 170
 Under our coping fain would he build
 A nest for his young from the stubble-field ?
 It shall hold thee aloof, my bow's fierce singing !
 Wilt thou heed not ?—Away, let thy nurslings hide
 Where the swirls of Alpheius coil and slide,
 Or mid Isthmian glens and groves,
 That the offerings undefiled may abide,
 And the temples that Phœbus loves.

Loth were I to slaughter such as ye,
 Which bear unto mortals the augury 180
 Of the Gods : but a burden is laid upon me :
 I am Phœbus' thrall, and I will not refrain
 My service to them that my life sustain.

Enter Chorus of Kreusa's Handmaids. They move to right and left, admiring the sculptures on the walls of the temple. Members of Chorus chant in turn :—

CHORUS I.

(Str.)

Not in Athens alone then, the city divine,
 Stand courts of the Gods, with line on line
 Of stately columns ; nor service is thine
 There only, O Highway-king.

Lo here, how in Loxias' holy place
The Son of Latona hath splendour and grace
Of a twofold-gleaming temple-face.

CHORUS 2.

Ah, look thou, behold this thing— 190
How with golden scimitar Zeus' Son here
Slayeth the hydra of Lerna's mere :
Dear, one glance hitherward fling !

CHORUS 1.

(*Ant.*)
I see it :—but lo, where another anigh
Is uplifting a flame-wrapped torch on high !
Who is it—who ? On my broidery
Is the hero's story told ?—
Is it not Iolaüs, the warrior there,
Who had part in the dread emprise, and a share
In the burdens that Zeus's scion bare ? 200

CHORUS 3.

Lo, lo, this other behold
Who rideth a winged horse, dealing death
To a dragon that vomiteth fiery breath,
A monster of shape threefold.

CHORUS 1.

O yea, mine eyes turn swiftly on all
But O, see there on the marble wall
The battle-rout of the giant-horde !

CHORUS 4.

Yea, friends, we be gazing thitherward.

CHORUS 5.

Dost mark who there on the stricken field
O'er Enkeladus waveth her gorgon-shield? 210

CHORUS 6.

Pallas, my Goddess!—I see her stand!

CHORUS 7.

Lo, lo, where the bolt flame-flashing
Gleameth in Zeus' far-hurling hand
In resistless rush down-crashing.

CHORUS 8.

I see :—upon Mimas his foe is the brand
With its blasting wildfire dashing.

CHORUS 9.

And the earth-born there—no battle-wand
Is the ivy-encircled thyrsus-rod
That slays him, of Bromius, Reveller-god.

CHORUS 10 (*addressing* ION).

Sir,—thou by the fane,—I would speak unto thee :
Prithee say, if with bare feet lawful it is 220
That the threshold we pass of the sanctuary.

ION.

Nay, strangers, forefended is this.

CHORUS 11.

Yet haply a thing I would learn wouldst thou show?

ION.

What is this that thou cravest to know?

CHORUS II.

Is it so, that the walls of Phœbus rise
Even there, where Earth's mid-navel lies?

ION.

Yea: and with wreaths is it hung, and watched by the
Gorgon-eyes.

CHORUS 12.

Ay, rumour hath published it so.

ION.

If a cake ye have cast on the forecourt's altar-fire,
And if there be aught that of Phœbus ye fain would
enquire,
Draw nigh to the altar-steps:—into the inner fane
Pass none, but with bloodshed of sheep for the sacrifice
slain.

CHORUS 13.

All this understand I aright: 230
We would trespass on nought by the God's law hidden:
Enough is without for our feast of sight.

ION.

Let your eyes gaze on upon all unforbidden.

CHORUS 14.

Our lady had given us leave,—“Upon all
These shrines,” hath she said, “may ye gaze.”

ION.

And the servants ye name you of what lord's hall ?

CHORUS 15.

In Pallas's dwelling-place
Is the mansion of princes that nurtured me ;—
But of whom thou enquirest, lo, here is she.

Enter Kreusa.

ION.

High birth is thine, and carriage consonant
Thereto, O lady, whosoe'er thou be.
For in a man oft-times may one discern,
Marking his bearing, strain of gentle blood. 240
Ha, thou dost move me strangely !—down-dropt eyes,
And noble cheeks all wet with rain of tears,
At sight of Loxias' pure oracle !
How cam'st thou, lady, 'neath such load of care ?
Where all beside, beholding the God's shrines, 245
Rejoice, a fountain is thine eye of tears.

KREUSA.

Stranger, I count it not discourtesy
That thou shouldst marvel touching these my tears.
But, looking on Apollo's dwelling-place,
I traversed o'er an ancient memory's track. 250
Afar my thoughts were, and my body here.
Ah, wrongs of women !—wrongful-reckless deeds
Of Gods ! For justice where shall we make suit,
If our Lords' tyranny shall ruin us ?

ION.

Lady, for what veiled grief art thou cast down ? 255

KREUSA.

Nought : I have sped my shaft : as touching this,
Nothing I say, nor thou conjecture aught.

ION.

Who art thou ? What thy country ? Of what sire
Wert born ? What name is meet we name thee by ?

KREUSA.

Kreusa I, of King Erechtheus born ; 260
The Athenian city is my fatherland.

ION.

O dweller in a glorious burg, and sprung
Of noble sires !—blest I account thee, lady.

KREUSA.

Thus far, nor farther, stranger, goes my weal.

ION.

Ah, is it true, the legend told to men— 265

KREUSA.

What wouldst thou, stranger, ask ? I fain would learn.

ION.

That from the earth thy father's grandsire sprang ?

KREUSA.

Yea, Erichthonius :—me his birth avails not.

ION.

And did Athênê take him forth the earth ?

KREUSA.

Yea, in her maiden arms : no mother she. 270

ION.

And gave it, as the pictured legend tells—

KREUSA.

To Kekrops' daughters to be nursed unseen.

ION.

The maids unsealed, I heard, Athênê's ark.

KREUSA.

Dashing the rocks with blood for this they died.

ION.

Ah, so

And this—true is it, or an idle tale ?— 275

KREUSA.

What wouldst thou ask ? My leisure serveth me.

ION.

Thy sisters did thy sire Erechtheus slay ?

KREUSA.

He sacrificed his daughters for his land.

ION.

How wast thou only of thy sisters saved ?

KREUSA.

A babe new-born in mother's arms was I. 280

ION.

And did earth yawning verily hide thy sire ?

KREUSA.

The Sea-god's trident smote him and destroyed.

ION.

The Long Cliffs—is a place so named therein ?

KREUSA.

Why dost ask this ?—thou wak'st a memory.

ION.

[285

Doth Phœbus honour them, and Pythian lightnings ?¹

KREUSA.

Honour them, quotha ! O to have seen them never !

ION.

What ?—hatest thou the God's haunt well-beloved ?

KREUSA.

Nought.—I and that cave know a deed of shame.

ION.

And what Athenian, lady, is thy lord ?

¹ Near the Long Cliffs was an altar of "Zeus the Lightning-lord." From this the priests kept watch on three days and three nights of three months in the year, looking north-west towards the gap between the border-ranges of Cithæron and Parnes, where lay the village of Harma. If lightnings were at such seasons observed in that quarter, they were regarded as a token from Apollo, and an embassy was sent to Delphi.

KREUSA.

No citizen. An outland alien. 290

ION.

Who?—sooth, of princely birth must he have been.

KREUSA.

Xuthus, the seed of Aiolus and Zeus.

ION.

How might an alien win thee, native-born?

KREUSA.

A neighbour state, Eubœa, Athens hath;—

ION.

Sundered by watery marches, as they tell. 295

KREUSA.

This smote he, spear-ally of Kekrops' sons.

ION.

Their war-aid :—and thereafter won thine hand?

KREUSA.

His dower of battle, guerdon of his spear.

ION.

With thy lord com'st thou hither, or alone?

KREUSA.

With him. He lingereth at Trophonius' cave. 300

ION.

To gaze thereon, or for an oracle ?

KREUSA.

One thing of him and Phœbus would he learn.

ION.

For increase of the land, or sons, come ye ?

KREUSA.

Childless we are, who have been wedded long.

ION.

Never hast thou born issue, barren all ? 305

KREUSA.

Phœbus doth know what childlessness is mine.

ION.

Blest in all else, sad heart, unblest in this !

KREUSA.

And who art thou ?—Blessèd the womb that bare thee !

ION.

Lady, the God's thrall I am called, and am.

KREUSA.

The city's offering ?—or of some one sold ? 310

ION.

I know but this—I am called Loxias' thrall.

KREUSA.

I then in turn, O stranger, pity thee.

ION.

As one that never sire nor mother knew.

KREUSA.

Dwellest thou in this temple, or a house ?

ION.

The God's wide halls be mine when I would sleep. 315

KREUSA.

A child, or stripling, cam'st thou to the fane ?

ION.

A babe was I, say they who best should know.

KREUSA.

And who of Delphi's daughters gave thee suck ?

ION.

Never I knew the breast. Mine only nurse—

KREUSA.

[320

Who, child of sorrow ?—How my wound finds thine !¹

ION.

Was Phœbus' priestess : her I count my mother.

1

“ Searching of thy wound
I have by hard adventure found mine own.”

As You Like It, ii. 4.

KREUSA.

How nurtured hast thou come to man's estate ?

ION.

The altars fed me : each chance stranger gave.

KREUSA.

Woe is thy mother, who she be soe'er.²

ION.

I am record haply of a woman's wrong. 325

KREUSA.

And hast thou wealth ?—for rich is thine attire.

ION.

Of Him is mine adorning, whom I serve.

KREUSA.

But on thy birth's track hast thou never pressed ?

ION.

Ah, lady, clue hereunto have I none.

KREUSA. [330

(*Sighs.*) There's one was even as thy mother wronged.

² The interruption to the sequence of thought in the lines which follow has given rise to various suggestions for their re-arrangement, *e.g.* by placing 324-5 after 328-9. Doubtless this would be a more logical arrangement, yet perhaps less womanlike than Kreusa's recurring, after a breathing-space, as it were, of unimportant query, to that feature in his history which really interests her, and so deeply that she cannot trust her self-command to follow it continuously.

ION.

Who?—would she share my burden, glad were I.

KREUSA.

For her sake came I, while delays my lord.

ION.

And what thy quest?—Lady, mine help is thine.

KREUSA.

Craving a secret oracle of Phœbus.

ION.

Speak it : myself will undertake for thee. 335

KREUSA.

Hear then the story :—but ashamed am I.

ION.

Shame shall not help thy strait,—a deedless Goddess !

KREUSA.

She saith—my friend—that Phœbus humbled her.

ION.

Phœbus !—a woman !—Stranger, say not so.

KREUSA.

And the God's child she bare, nor knew her sire. 340

ION.

Never !—a man's crime this, and hers the shame.

KREUSA.

No!—herself saith. She hath suffered griefs beside.

ION.

Suffered?—for what sin wrought—this bride of heaven?

KREUSA.

The son she bare she cast forth from her halls.

ION.

Where is her cast-out child? Doth he see light? 345

KREUSA.

None knows. For this I seek the oracle.

ION.

But, if he be no more, how perished he?

KREUSA.

Wild beasts, she troweth, slew the hapless babe.

ION.

And by what token knew she this had been?

KREUSA.

She came where she had left him, and found not. 350

ION.

And blood-gouts—were there any on the track?

KREUSA.

Nay, saith she: yet she traversed oft the ground.

ION.

How long the time since this child's taking-off?

KREUSA.

Living, he had had the measure of thy years.

ION.

And hath she born no offspring after this? 355

KREUSA.

Still the God wrongs her : childless grief is hers.

ION.

What if in secret Phœbus fostereth him?

KREUSA.

Unjust !—alone to enjoy what he should share.

ION.

Ah me ! her heart-strings are attuned to mine !

KREUSA.

For thee yearns some sad mother too, I ween. 360

ION.

Ah, wake not thou mine half-forgotten grief.

KREUSA.

I am dumb : whereof I question thee, say on.

ION.

Seest thou where lies the weakness of thy plea?

KREUSA.

Ah, hapless one, wherein is she not weak !

ION.

How should the God reveal that he would hide ? 365

KREUSA.

Why then on Greece's tripod sitteth he ?

ION.

His shame the deed is. Question not of him.

KREUSA.

O yea, the sufferer in her lot may pine !

ION.

There's none will ask the God of this for thee.
For, in his own halls were he villain proved, 370
Vengeance on him who brought thee that response
Would Phoebus justly wreak. Ah lady, go :
We must not seek his shrine to flout the God.
For lo, what height of folly should we reach
If in the Gods' despite we wrest their will, 375
By sacrifice of sheep on altars, or
By flight of birds, to tell what they would veil.
Could we of force wring aught from Gods full loth,
Profitless blessings, lady, should we grasp ;
But what they give free-willed are boons indeed. 380

CHORUS.

Strange chances many on many mortals fall,
And manifold their forms. Ye scarce shall find
One happy lot in all the life of men.

KREUSA.

O Phœbus, there and here unjust art thou
Unto the absent one whose plea is here. 385
Thou shouldst have saved thine own, yet didst not
save ;

Nor heeds the Seer the mother's questioning,
That, if her babe live not, his tomb may rise,
Or, if he live, that she may see his face.
Yet must I let this be, if by the God 390
I am barred from learning that which I desire.
But, stranger,—for I see my princely lord,
Xuthus, anigh us yonder, who hath left
Trophonius' crypt,—of this that we have said
Speak to my lord nought, lest I get me shame 395
For handling secrets, and the tale fall out
Not after our unravelling thereof.
For woman's lot as touching men is hard ;
And, since the good are with the bad confused,
Hated we are :—ill-starred we are from birth. 400

Enter Xuthus.

XUTHUS.

First, to the God the firstfruits of my greetings :
All hail to him, and hail to thee, my wife.
Hath my late-lingering thrilled thee with dismay ?

KREUSA.

Nay, 'tis but care that meets thee. Tell to me
What answer from Trophonius bringest thou, 405
How we shall have joint issue, thou and I ?

XUTHUS.

He took not on him to forestall the word

Of Phœbus. This he said—nor thou nor I
Childless shall wend home from the oracle.

KREUSA.

Queen, Phœbus' mother, grant our home-return 410
Prosperous: all our dealings heretofore
Touching thy son, to happier issue fall!

XUTHUS.

This shall be. Who speaks to the God for men?

ION.

Without, I; others for the things within,
Stranger, which nigh unto the tripod sit, 415
The Delphian lords, in order of their lot.

XUTHUS.

'Tis well: now know I all I sought to know.
I will pass in; for, as I hear it told,
To strangers of the forecourt hath there chanced
An open oracle. I would fain this day— 420
This day fair-omened—gain the God's response.
Thou to the bay-crowned altars bear the boughs,
My wife, and pray the Gods that I may win
Promise of fair sons from Apollo's fane.

KREUSA.

Yea, this shall be. [*Exit Xuthus to inner Temple.*
If Loxias consent 425
Now at the last to atone for olden wrongs,
Not utterly should he become my friend,
Yet, as a God's, will I accept his pleasure. [*Exit.*

ION.

Why doth this stranger rail upon the God
 In riddles of dark sayings evermore? 430
 For love of her for whom she seeks the shrine?
 Or keeping back a thing she must not speak?—
 But with Erechtheus' daughter what have I
 To do? She is nought to me. But I will go
 Unto the lavers with the golden ewers 435
 To pour in water-dews. Yet must I plead¹
 With Phœbus—what ails him? He ravisheth
 Maids, and forsakes: begetteth babes by stealth
 And heeds not, though they die. Do thou not so!
 Being strong, be righteous. For what man soe'er 440
 Transgresseth, the Gods visit this on him.
 How were it just then that ye should enact
 For men laws, and yourselves work lawlessness?
 For if—it could not be, yet put it so—
 Ye should pay mulct to men for lawless lust,² 445
 Thou, the Sea-king, and Zeus the lord of heaven,
 Paying for wrongs should make your temples void.
 For, following pleasure past all wisdom's bounds,
 Ye work unrighteousness. Unjust it were
 To call men vile, if we but imitate 450
 The sins of Gods:—they are vile which teach us this.
[Exit.

¹ "The freedom of this remark is scarcely in keeping with previous indications of Ion's attitude towards the God." (Bayfield) Does it not rather well display that "perfect love which casteth out fear."? Compare Moses' expostulation with God, in Numbers xiv, 15, 16.

² The fine for violence to a virgin was, by Solon's laws, a thousand drachmas.

CHORUS.

(Str.)

My Queen, at whose birth-tide was given
Of the Lady of Travail-pang
No help, hear, Pallas, my prayer,
Whom the crown of a God's head bare
By Prometheus the Titan riven
When the Daughter of Zeus forth sprang.

Come, Victory-queen, to the dwelling
Pythian, speeding thy wing
From Olympus' chambers of gold
To the streets that the World's Heart hold, 460
Where the bodings of Phœbus are told,—
Yea, brought to pass in the telling,—
At the tripod that dances enring.

Thou also, Latona's Daughter,—
Two Goddesses, maidens twain,
Phœbus's sisters divine,
With us interceding O join,
That Erechtheus' ancient line
Through bodings clear-lucid as water 470
Fair offspring at last may attain.

(Ant.)

For a fountain is this ever-welling
Of happiness passing the lot
Of mortals, when stalwart and tall
Shines fair in a father's hall
The presence of sons, foretelling
A line that shall perish not ;

Sons, that, when death bringeth severance,
Shall receive to pass on to their seed

The wealth that their sires' hands hold : 480
 Yea, by these be our sorrows consoled,
 And a joy within joy they enfold,
 And their spear flasheth light of deliverance¹
 In the hour of the fatherland's need.

Ah, far above golden treasure
 Or than princely halls do I praise
 Dear children to cherish—mine own !
 Mine horror were life all lone :
 Who loveth it, wit hath he none :
 But give to me substance in measure, 490
 And children to brighten my days !
(*Epode*)

O haunts of Pan's abiding,
 O sentinel rock down-gazing
 On the Long-cliff caves dim-glimmering,
 Where, with shadowy feet in the dance soft-sliding,
 Agraulus' daughters three go pacing
 O'er the lawns by Athênê's fane dew-shimmering
 In moonlight, while upward floats
 A weird strain rising and falling,
 Wild witchery-wafting notes, 500
 O Pan, from thy pipes that are calling
 Out of thy sunless grots !²

Ah, a maid-mother there most woe-forlorn
 Cast Phœbus's child for a banquet gory—
 Bitter outrage's fruit !—by the birds to be torn
 And the beasts. Nor in woven web nor in story
 Ever heard I of happiness blent with the glory
 Of Gods' seed woman-born.

¹ αἰγλαν (Herwerden) *vice* ἀλκάν

² See note to l. 21.

Enter Ion.

ION.

Bower-maidens, ye which keeping watch the altar-steps
 beside 510
 Of the incense-clouded fane, your master's coming forth
 abide,
 Say, hath Xuthus left by this the holy tripod and the
 shrine,
 Or within yet lingering asks he touching that long-
 childless line ?

CHORUS.

In the temple is he, stranger, treads not yet the
 threshold-stone.
 List, a sound at yonder portal—through the porchway
 passeth one :— 515
 Lo, where now he cometh forth—our master, plain for
 eyes to see.

Enter Xuthus : attempts to embrace Ion.

XUTHUS.

Hail, my son !—for fitting prelude this is of my speech
 to thee.

ION.

Hale I am : but thou, control thee ; then were twain
 in happy case.

XUTHUS.

Let me kiss thine hand, and let me fold thy form in
 mine embrace !

ION.

Stranger, hast thy wits ?—or is thy mind distraught by
 stroke of heaven ? 520

XUTHUS.

Right my wit is, if I long to kiss my best-beloved
regiven.

ION.

Hold—hands off!—the temple-garlands of Apollo rend
not thou!

XUTHUS.

Touch thee will I!—No man-stealer; but I find my
darling now.

ION (*starting back, and fitting an arrow to his bow*).

Wilt not hence, or ever thou receive my shaft thy ribs
within?

XUTHUS.

Wherefore dost thou flee me, who hast learnt to know
thy nearest kin?

525

ION.

Nought I love to admonish aliens mannerless and
sense-bereft.

XUTHUS.

Slay—then burn me;¹ for a father's heart thine arrow
shall have cleft.

ION.

Thou my father!—Is not this a laughter-scoff for me
to hear?

XUTHUS.

Nay, the eager-hurrying word shall show thee all my
meaning clear.

¹ It being the sacred duty of the son to lay the father's
corpse upon the pyre.

ION.

Ay, and what wilt tell?

XUTHUS.

Thy father am I, and thou art my son. 530

ION.

Who the voucher?

XUTHUS.

Loxias, who reared the child that I have won.

ION.

Thou art thine own witness.

XUTHUS.

Nay, the God's own oracle I heard.

ION.

Heardest riddles and misreadest.

XUTHUS.

Then mine ears can hear no word.

ION.

What was this, the word of Phœbus?

XUTHUS.

That the man who met my face—

ION.

Met thee—met thee?

XUTHUS.

As I came from out Apollo's holy place— 535

ION.

Ay, and what should be his fate?

XUTHUS.

My true-begotten son is this.

ION.

Born thy son, or given of others?

XUTHUS.

Given—and born from me he is.¹

ION.

So on me thy foot first stumbled?

XUTHUS.

Yea, my son, on none beside.

ION.

Ay, and whence this happy chance?

XUTHUS.

We marvel both it should betide.

ION.

Ha, what mother bare me to thee?

XUTHUS.

Sooth, thereof can I say nought. 540

¹ There may be oracular ambiguity here; ἐξ being (like "from" in a common Shaksperian usage) susceptible of the sense "apart, or remote from," as in the oracle given to Odysseus respecting his own end, *Odys.* xi, 134. c.f. note on l. 1546.

ION.

Neither Phœbus told?

XUTHUS.

For joy of this thing, that I never sought.

ION.

Ah, a child of mother Earth!

XUTHUS.

Nay, children spring not from the sod.

ION.

How then thine am I?

XUTHUS.

I know not: I refer it to the God.

ION.

Come, to other reasonings turn we.¹

XUTHUS.

Better so, my son, in sooth.

ION.

Hadst thou ever part in lawless love?

XUTHUS.

Mid follies of my youth. 545

ION.

Ere Erechtheus' daughter wed thee?

¹ Ion's incredulity has so far made all his questions and comments bitterly sarcastic: but now, impressed by Xuthus' unshaken faith, he thinks the matter worth investigation.

XUTHUS.

Since, to her have I been true.

ION.

Haply then didst thou beget me ?

XUTHUS.

Time is consonant thereto.¹

ION.

Were it so, how came I hither ?

XUTHUS.

Nay, I cannot fathom it.

ION.

Long the journey for a babe !

XUTHUS.

This too o'erpasseth all my wit.

ION.

Hast thou seen ere this the Pythian Rock ?

XUTHUS.

At Bacchus' festal rite. 550

ION.

Lodging with a Public Host ?

XUTHUS.

Yea ; and with Delphian girls by night—

¹ *i.e.* Your apparent age fits the supposition.

ION.

Made initiate—this thy meaning ?¹

XUTHUS.

They were maidens Bacchanal.²

ION.

Sober, or of wine o'ercome ?

XUTHUS.

Of Bacchus' joys did this befall.

ION.

This is my begetting's story !

XUTHUS.

Fate, my son, hath found it out.

ION.

Yet, how came I to the fane ?

XUTHUS.

The maiden cast thee forth, I doubt. 555

ION (*aside*).

So, I 'scape the taint of serfdom—³

¹ c.f. "Convey, the wise it call." No resident of Delphi could affect to be ignorant of the excesses veiled under the expression "Initiated into the Orgiastic Mysteries of Bacchus."

² i.e., The religious license (perhaps obligation) of the occasion furnishes an excuse, if not a justification.

³ As none but free-born Delphian women could take part in the "Orgies." But the "temple-slaves" were commonly bought of slave-dealers: hence the relief to Ion's mind.

XUTHUS.

Son, thy father now receive.

ION (*aside*).

'Tis the God : I may not doubt him—

XUTHUS.

Yea, 'tis wisdom to believe.

ION (*aside*).

What thing higher can I wish for—

XUTHUS.

Now thou seest clear and true.

ION (*aside*).

Than the fatherhood of Zeus ?

XUTHUS.

O yea, by birth is this thy due.¹

ION.

Shall I clasp him, my begetter ?

XUTHUS.

If with Phœbus thou comply. 560

ION.

Hail to thee, my father !

¹ Xuthus being descended from Zeus. But this is an example of "Tragic Irony," wherein a speaker "speaks truer than he knows ;" Ion being in reality the son of Apollo, son of Zeus.

XUTHUS.

Joyfully I welcome this thy cry.

ION.

Hail the day that sees our meeting !

XUTHUS.

Happy man it maketh me.

ION.

Ah, belovèd mother, when thy visage also shall I see ?
More than ever now I long to see thee, who thou be
soe'er.

Ah, but thou perchance art dead, and all in vain should
be my prayer. 565

CHORUS.

Ours too the house's happy fortune is :
Yet fain were I our queen were also blest
With offspring, and Erechtheus' ancient line.

XUTHUS.

My son, as touching thy discovery
The God spake sooth, and so joined thee and me. 570
Thou hast found thy dearest, erst to thee unknown.
For thy just yearning, this is also mine,
That thou mayst find thy mother, O my son,
And I, the woman of whose womb thou art.
This shall we find forth haply, left to time. 575
Now, leave the God's floor, and thine homeless state :
To Athens come, with thine heart even as mine.
There waiteth thee thy father's sceptred bliss,
And much wealth. None shall cast into thy teeth

One of these taunts, base birth or poverty. 580
 High-born art thou, a mighty man of wealth.
 Silent?—Now wherefore earthward droops thine eye,
 And thou art deep in thought, and from thy joy
 Art changed, and strikest dread into thy sire?

ION.

The face of things appeareth not the same 585
 Far off, and when we scan them nigh at hand.
 So do I greet with gladness this my lot
 Who find a sire : howbeit hear what burden
 Weighs on my soul. The glorious earth-born state,
 Athens, men say, hath nought of alien strain. 590
 I shall thrust in, stained with a twofold taint—
 An outland father, and my bastard self.
 And, bearing this reproach, nor strong in friends,
 “ Nobody ” shall be called—“ Nobody’s Son.”
 Then, if I press to Athens’ highest ranks, 595
 And seek a name, of them that fail shall I
 Win hate : with climbers aye climbs jealousy.
 And noble souls, born guides of men, which yet
 Are silent, meddling not with things of state,
 To them shall I be laughing-stock and fool, 600
 Who, in a town censorious,¹ go not softly.
 Yea, if mid men of mark, which helm the state,
 I win repute, I shall be hedged in more
 By checking votes.² Thus is it ever, father :
 They which sway nations, and have won repute, 605
 To young ambitions are the bitterest foes.

¹ v.l. *φόβου πλέα*, “ suspicious.”

² Shall be hampered in action by the votes of the people, which, in a democratic state (for Euripides is describing the Athens of his own day), may check him at every turn.

Then, coming to a strange house, alien I,
And to a childless lady, who hath shared
With thee her sorrow heretofore, but now
Shall bear in bitterness her reproach alone, 610
How shall I not, with reason, have her hate,
When by thy knee I stand, she on thy love
Looketh with bitter eyes of childlessness,—
When thou must cast me off and cleave to her,
Or honour me, and wreck thine household's peace? 615
How oft the dagger and the deadly bowl
Have women found to slay their lords withal !
Nay, father, more—I pity this thy wife
Who grows grey childless. 'Tis not worthy her, [620
Sprung from proud sires—this curse of childlessness.
And power—this power men falsely praise so oft,
Winsome its face is, but behind the veil
Is torment. Who is happy, fortunate who,
That, fearing violence, glancing aye askance,
Weareth out life? Nay, rather would I live 625
Happy-obscure, than be exalted prince,—
One who must joy to have for friends the vile,
Who hates the good, and ever dreads to die.
“ Ah,” thou wilt say, “ gold overbears all this,
And wealth is sweet.” Would I clutch lucre—groan
Under its load, with curses in mine ears? [630
Nay, wealth for me in measure, sorrowless.
But, father, hear what blessings here were mine :—
First, leisure, dearest of delights to men :
Friendly the folk ; no villain jostleth me 635
Out of the path : it galls the very soul
To yield the pass, and vail to baser men.
My life was prayer to Gods, converse with men,
Ministrant unto joy and not to grief,

Welcoming coming, speeding parting guests, 640
 A new face smiling still on faces new.
 And that which men, though loth, must ask in prayer,
 Uprightness, use and nature bred in me
 For Phœbus' service. Thinking on all this,
 Father, I more esteem things here than there. 645
 Mine own life let me live. Content with little
 Hath charm no less than joy in great estate.

CHORUS.

Well hast thou said, so be that those I love
 In these thy words may find their happiness.

XUTHUS.

Of this no more : but learn to bear thy fortune. 650
 For, where I found thee, there would I begin,
 By making thee a solemn public feast,
 And thy birth-sacrifice,¹ not offered yet.
 Now to the feast as my guest bringing thee,
 I'll make thee cheer : then to the Athenians' land 655
 Bring thee as one that travelleth, not as mine.
 For, sooth, I have no heart to vex my wife
 With mine own bliss, while she is childless still.
 And I shall find a time to bring my queen
 To suffer thee to take my sceptred sway. 660
 Ion¹ I name thee, of that happy chance
 In that, as forth Apollo's shrine I came,
 First lighted I on thee. Now all thy friends
 To this glad feast of sacrifice gather thou,
 To bid, as leaving Delphi soon, farewell. 665

¹ Customarily offered on the day of birth, and again on the fifth day after, when the child receiveth its name.

¹ "Ἴων, "coming," because met at his *coming forth*.

You, handmaids, I command, speak not hereof.
Death—if ye say to my wife anything !

ION.

I go : yet to my fortune one thing lacks :
For, save I find her who gave life to me,
My life is naught. If one prayer be vouchsafed, 670
Of Athens' daughters may my mother be,
That by my mother may free speech be mine.
For, if a stranger pass into a burg
Of pure blood, burgher though he be in name,
Bond is his tongue, and he hath not free speech. 675
[*Exeunt.*]

CHORUS.

(*Str.*)

O vision of tears, and of fierce heart-burning
Breaking forth into shrieks and the onrush of sighing,¹
When my lady beholdeth her chieftain returning
In glory of fatherhood—knoweth that yearning
Of childlessness waiteth her, hunger undying ! 680
Seer-son of Latona, what strain hast thou chanted ?
Whence came he, the waif in thy temple-porch lying ?
Thy fosterling—yea, but a mother yet wanted !
And the oracle stirreth mine heart to defying
Of its tones with the whisper of treachery haunted.
I fear whereunto it will grow,
This fate thou hast caused us to know.
Too strange for my credence it is. 690
Child fathered of fortune and treason !
Child alien of blood !—it were reason
That all should cry yea unto this.

¹ Reading ἀλαλαγὰς στεναγμάτων τ'

(Ant.)

Friends, shall I bear to my lady the story ?

Shall I speak in her ear, her lord's baseness revealing ?
Whom she counted her all and in all—heretofore he
Had share in her dreams of a yet-coming glory.

Now in woe is she whelmed, but his heart hath
found healing,
That he flouts the dear tresses and eld's silver-
strewing ! 700

O caitiff and outlander, he that came stealing
On the wealth of a house he saved not from undoing !¹—

Who would cozen my lady with treacherous dealing—
False one, away to thy ruin, thy ruin !

O'er the consecrate cake he shall lay
Mid your altar-flames, Gods, let them play
Unavailingly !²—Ah but my queen 710
Shall know that I hold her the dearer !

Lo, this strange feast draweth nearer
When the sire's strange son shall be seen.

(Epode).

Heights of Parnassus, rock-ridges upbearing
The watchtower crags and the cloudland dome,
Where Bacchus, uptossing the pines flame-glaring,
Leaps mid his Bacchants through darkness that roam,
May never yon boy to my city come faring !

Be his birth-day the day of his doom ! 720

¹ Xuthus, though, by his marriage with the princess of Athens, he came into possession of the wealth of the royal house of Erechtheus, had not, by perpetuating the race of true-born Erechtheids, saved that house from extinction, since Ion was so far known only as the son of an alien father and of an (unknown) alien mother.

² i.e., May the birth-sacrifice about to be offered be unblest.

For in sooth should our city be hard bestead
 If an alien host to her hearths shall be led.
 Suffice us Erechtheus, the kingly head
 Of the Ancient Home!

*Enter Kreusa and Old Servant, climbing the ascent to
 the Temple.*

KREUSA.

Thou reverend child-ward of my sometime sire 725
 Erechtheus, while he walked yet in the light,
 Bear up, and press to yon God's oracle,
 That thou mayst share my joy, if Loxias King
 One boding-pledge of sons hath uttered forth.
 'Tis sweet with friends to share prosperity : 730
 And if—which God forbid—if ill befall,
 'Tis sweet to gaze in eyes of sympathy.
 Now thine old loving tendance of my sire
 I, though thy lady, render back to thee.

OLD SERVANT.

My daughter, spirit worthy of noble sires 735
 Thou keepest, and thou hast not put to shame
 Thine old forefathers, children of the soil.
 Draw, draw me towards the shrines, and bring me on.
 Steep is the god-ward path : be thou physician
 Unto mine age, and help my toiling limbs. 740

KREUSA.

Follow : take heed where thou dost plant thy feet.

OLD SERVANT.

Lo there !
 Slow is the foot, still by the mind outstripped.

KREUSA.

Bear up thy foot's tread with the groping staff.¹

OLD SERVANT.

Blind guide is this when mine eyes serve so ill.

KREUSA.

Sooth said : yet yield not thou to weariness. 745

OLD SERVANT.

I would not, but my lost strength I command not.

KREUSA.

Women, which do leal service at my loom
And shuttle, show what fortune hath my lord
Found touching issue, for which cause we came.
For, if ye speak good tidings unto me, 750
Your queen shall not forget the debt of joy.

CHORUS.

Ah fate !

OLD SERVANT (*aside*).

No happy-boding prelude of their speech !

CHORUS.

Ah hapless !

OLD SERVANT (*aside*).

Ha, sinks mine heart for my lords' oracle ? 755

¹ Reading ποδός and περιφερῆ. If περιφερῆ, we might render "Prop with thy staff thy foot's uncertain tread;" referring to the manner in which the foot nervously tries the ground round about ; its inequalities being dimly seen.

CHORUS.

What shall we do when death is in the path?

KREUSA.

What means this strain, and wherefore is your fear?

CHORUS.

Speech?—silence?—what is it that we should do?

KREUSA.

Speak: something ye keep back that toucheth me.

CHORUS.

Thou shalt be told,—yea, though I die twice over. 760
'Tis not for thee, my queen, in arms to fold
Children, nor press them ever to thy breast.

KREUSA.

Ah, would I might die!

OLD SERVANT.

Daughter—

KREUSA.

Ah wretch!—ah me for my misery! [765
I have gotten sore hurt, my friends: what is life unto me?

OLD SERVANT.

Undone—thou and I!

O child!

KREUSA.

Ah me, ah me! for the anguish-dart
Hath pierced me through, and hath plunged deep into
mine heart.

OLD SERVANT.

Nay, moan not yet—

KREUSA.

But wailings the soul of me fill !

OLD SERVANT.

Ere we shall learn—

KREUSA.

What tidings remain for me still ? 770

OLD SERVANT.

If in the same calamity our lord
Have part, or thine alone misfortune be.

CHORUS.

Ancient, to him hath Loxias given a son,
And private joy is his, unshared of her. 775

KREUSA.

Ah sorrow on sorrow, for crown of sorrow, and woes
for my sighing !

OLD SERVANT.

But of some woman must he yet be born,
This child ?—or did the God proclaim him born ?

CHORUS.

Already born—nay more, a stripling grown 780
Doth Loxias give him. I was there, and heard.

KREUSA.

How sayest thou ?—nameless, unspeakable things in
mine ears art thou crying—

OLD SERVANT.

And mine. But how works out the oracle ? 785
More clearly tell me : who the lad is, tell.

CHORUS.

Whomso thy lord should first meet as he passed
From the God's fane, the God gave him for son.

KREUSA.

Ah me ! ah me !—and my weird
Of barrenness, barrenness grippeth my life !—desolation-
oppressed 790
Shall I live on, living in childless halls !

OLD SERVANT.

Who was the child foretold ? whom met he first,
Our sad queen's lord ? How saw he him, and where ?

CHORUS.

Rememberest thou, O dear my queen, the youth
That swept the temple's floor ? That son is he. 795

KREUSA.

Oh to flee on the wings of a bird
Through the ocean of air, and from Hellas afar to the
stars of the west !
Such pain on me, friends, such anguish falls !

OLD SERVANT.

And what name hath his father given to him ? 800
Know'st thou ? Or bideth this unfixed, unsaid ?

CHORUS.

Ion, since he was first to meet his sire.

OLD SERVANT.

His mother, who ?

CHORUS.

Thereof can I say nought.

My lady's spouse hath stol'n—that all my tale
Be known of thee—into the festal tent, 805
To sacrifice for welcoming and birth,
And spread a public feast for this new son.

OLD SERVANT.

Betrayed, Queen, are we—for thy pain is mine—
Of this thy lord ; by treason-stratagems
Insulted ; from Erechtheus' palace-halls 810
Cast forth ! And this I say, as hating not
Thy lord, but better loving thee than him,
Who came a stranger to thy burg and home,
Wedded thee, and received thine heritage,
And of another woman gat him sons 815
Clandestine : this “ clandestine ” will I prove :—
Knowing thee barren, he was not content
To share thy fortune, to partake thy lot,
But took a slave to his clandestine bed,
Begot this son, from Athens sent him, gave 820
Unto some Delphian's fostering : for concealment
Was he reared in the temple, consecrate.
So, when he knew the stripling fully grown,
He drew thee hither by the hope of sons.
So, not the God hath lied, but this man lied, 825
Rearing so long the lad, weaving such plots.
Detected here, he would cast it on the God :
But, once in Athens, he would set her crown
Upon him, guarding 'gainst the chance of time.

But this *new name's* misdated forgery!— 830
 Ion—set eye on him then first, forsooth!

CHORUS.

Ah me! how evermore I loathe the knave
 That plotteth wrongs, and then with stratagem
 Tricks forth! Be mine the friend of simple soul
 Yet honest, rather than the craftier villain. 835

OLD SERVANT.

And a worse ill than all this must thou know,
 To take into thine house for lord thereof
 A slave's brat, motherless, of none account!
 'Twere but one ill, if from a free-born womb,
 With thy consent, pleading thy barrenness, 840
 He found an heir. Or, if this liked thee not,
 He ought to have sought a wife of Aiulus' race.
 Now, something worthy of woman must thou do—
 Or grasp the sword, or by some wiliness
 Or poison slay thine husband and his son, 845
 Or ever death shall come from them to thee.
 For, if thou flinch,¹ 'tis thou shalt lose thy life:
 For, when two foes beneath one roof be met,
 This one or that one must the victim be.
 Willing am I with thee to share this work, 850
 To enter the pavilion, slay the lad
 Where he prepares the feast:—repaying so
 My lords their nurture, let me die or live!
 There is but one thing bringeth shame to slaves,
 The name: in all else ne'er a slave is worse 855
 Than free men, so he bear an upright soul.

¹ Retaining the MS. *ὑφῆσαι*, *vice* *σὺ φείσει*, "spare" (Badham).

CHORUS.

I too, dear mistress, I consent to share
Thy fate, or death, or honourable life.

KREUSA.

O, how keep silence, my soul ?
Yet how shall I dare to unroll 860
Deeds hidden of darkness, and cast the shame behind
me ?
Yet what thing remaineth to fetter me, what thing to
bind me ?
With whom can I stand in virtue's glorious strife ?
Hath not mine husband a traitor been shown to his
wife ?
I am wholly of home bereft, of my children bereft :
Of the hopes unavailing I cherished not one is left,
Who dreamed I should order all things well,
Yet nought of that bridal of horror tell,
Nought of the birth amid tears that befell.
Now nay—by the palace of Zeus star-brightened, 870
By the watchtower crag where my Goddess's
throne is,
By the holy shore of the mere Tritonis
Full-brimming mid Libya's plain,
Mine outrage no more will I hide, that lightened
My bosom may be of its pain.
Mine eyes are a fountain of tears fast-welling,
And mine heart is betrayed and anguish-riven,
Betrayed of lovers on earth, in heaven !
I will speak it, that thankless name forth telling,
And the tale of the traitor to love shall be given. 880
Lord of the sevenfold lyre, who attunest the voice of its
strings,

Under whose fingers the lifeless awaketh, the melody
sings

From the horn-sherds of oxen, the chant of the Muses
in sweetness outrings—

Child of Latona, I cry to the Sun—I will publish thy
shame!

Thou, with thy tresses a-shimmer with gold, through
the flowers as I came

Plucking the crocuses, heaping my veil with their gold-
litten flame, 890

Cam'st on me, caughtest the poor pallid wrists of mine
hands, and didst hale

Unto thy couch in the cave,—“Mother! mother!” I
shrieked out my wail,—

Wroughtest the pleasure of Kypris: no shame made
the god-lover quail.

Wretched I bare thee a child, and I cast him with
shuddering throe

Forth on thy couch where thou forcedst thy victim, a
bride-bed of woe. 900

Lost—my poor baby and thine! for the eagles devoured
him:—and lo,

Victory-songs to thy lyre dost thou chant!—Ho, I call
to thee, son

Born to Latona, Dispenser of Boding, on gold-gleaming
throne

Midmost of earth who art sitting:—thine ears shall be
pierced with my moan! 910

Ah, ravisher-bridegroom thou!

What ailed thee to give to my spouse—

Requiting no service, I trow!—
 A son to be heir to his house?
 But my baby and thine, O heartless, was taken
 For a prey of the eagles: long ere now
 Were the swaddling-bands of his mother forsaken.

Thy Delos doth hate thee, thy bay-boughs abhor
 thee, [920
 By the palm-tree of feathery frondage that rose
 Where in sacred travail Latona bore thee
 In Zeus's garden-close.¹

CHORUS.

Ah me, what mighty treasure-house is opened
 Of woes, whereat shall each and all shed tears!

OLD SERVANT.

Ah daughter, gazing on thy face I fill 925
 With pity: yea, my mind is all distraught.
 For, while one surge of ills yet drowns my soul,
 High rolls astern another from thy words.
 For, soon as thou hadst told thy present ills,
 Thou followedst the foul track of other woes. 930
 What say'st thou? What dost lay to Loxias' charge?
 What child hast born? In Athens where didst cast
 him
 To gladden a living grave?—tell yet again.

KREUSA.

Ancient, I blush before thee, yet will tell.

¹ Reading *κάποις* (Badham, etc.) *vice* *καρποῖς*, "Unto Zeus for the fruit of her throes."

OLD SERVANT.

To weep with friends that weep, full well I know. 935

KREUSA.

Hear then :—the Rocks of Kekrops knowest thou
The Long Cliff named ?—the northward-facing cave ?

OLD SERVANT.

I know : Pan's shrine and altars stand thereby.

KREUSA.

Even there I agonized in that dread strife—

OLD SERVANT.

What ?—lo, how start my tears to meet thy words ! 940

KREUSA.

With Phœbus linked sore loth in woeful bridal.

OLD SERVANT.

Ah daughter, was it this myself had marked ?

KREUSA.

Had marked ?—If sooth thou sayest, I will tell.

OLD SERVANT.

Thy secret sighing as with hidden pain ?

KREUSA.

Yea ; then befell the ills I now lay bare. 945

OLD SERVANT.

And how didst thou conceal Apollo's rape ?

KREUSA.

I travailed—bear to hear my tale, old friend !—

OLD SERVANT.

Who tended thee ? . . . alone in trial's hour !

KREUSA.

Alone within the cave that saw my rape.

OLD SERVANT. [950

And the boy, where ?—that thou no more be childless.

KREUSA.

Dead is he, ancient,—unto beasts cast out.

OLD SERVANT.

Dead ?—and Apollo, traitor ! helped thee nought ?

KREUSA.

Helped not. The child is nursed in Hades' halls.

OLD SERVANT.

Who cast him forth ?—Not thou—O never thou !

KREUSA.

Even I. My vesture darkling swaddled him. 955

OLD SERVANT.

Nor any knew the exposing of the child ?

KREUSA.

None—Misery and Secrecy alone.

OLD SERVANT.

How couldst thou leave thy babe within the cave ?

KREUSA.

Ah how ?—O pitiful farewells I moaned !

OLD SERVANT.

Poor heart of steel !—O God's heart harder yet ! 960

KREUSA.

Ah, hadst thou seen the babe's hands stretched to me !

OLD SERVANT.

Seeking the breast, or cradle of thine arms ?

KREUSA.

Where he lay not, and so had wrong of me.

OLD SERVANT.

And in what hope didst thou cast forth the babe ?

KREUSA.

That the God yet would save him—his own child. 965

OLD SERVANT.

Ah me, what tempest wrecks thine house's weal !

KREUSA.

Why dost thou, ancient, veil thine head, and weep ?

OLD SERVANT.

Seeing calamity, thy sire's and thine.

KREUSA.

'Tis man's lot : nought continueth at one stay.

OLD SERVANT.

Cling we no more to wailings, daughter, now. 970

KREUSA.

What must I do ?—so helpless misery is.

OLD SERVANT.

Avenge thee on the God who wronged thee first.

KREUSA.

How ?—I, a mortal, triumph o'er the strong ?

OLD SERVANT.

Set thou the torch to Loxias' holy shrine.

KREUSA.

I fear :—even now I have enough of woes. 975

OLD SERVANT.

Then dare the thing thou canst : thine husband slay.

KREUSA.

I cannot—for old love and loyalty's sake.

OLD SERVANT.

The boy, at least, thus foisted upon thee.

KREUSA.

How ?—would 'twere possible !—how fain would I !

OLD SERVANT.

With daggers arm the servants of thy train. 980

KREUSA.

I will go straight :—but when to strike the blow ?

OLD SERVANT.

In the pavilion, where he feasts his friends.

KREUSA.

Murder in public—and weak hearts of thralls !

OLD SERVANT.

Woe ! thine heart fails. Do thine own plotting now.

KREUSA.

Ha, mine is secret guile and triumph sure. 985

OLD SERVANT.

Yea, both ?—then will I be thy minister.

KREUSA.

Hear then :—thou knowest of the Earth-born War ?

OLD SERVANT.

Yea, giants stood in Phlegra 'gainst the Gods.

KREUSA.

There Earth brought forth the Gorgon, monster dread—

OLD SERVANT.

To help her sons, and press the Gods full hard ? 990

KREUSA.

Yea, and Zeus' Daughter, Goddess Pallas, slew it.

OLD SERVANT.

What was the fashion of its grisly form ?

KREUSA.

A breastplate fenced with ring on ring of snakes.

OLD SERVANT.

Meseems I heard this legend long ago—

KREUSA.

How on her breast Athênê bore its skin. 995

OLD SERVANT.

Ay, named the Aegis, Pallas's array ?

KREUSA.

Of Gods named, from her battle-eager¹ charge.

OLD SERVANT.

But, daughter, how shall this thing harm thy foes ?

KREUSA.

Knowest thou Erichthonius ?—thou must.

OLD SERVANT. [1000

First father of your line, whom earth brought forth ?

¹ Reading ἥξεν, with Paley, *vice* MSS. ἥλθεν.

KREUSA.

To him gave Pallas in his hour of birth—

OLD SERVANT.

What?—thy word falters in the utterance.

KREUSA.

Two drops of blood—of that same Gorgon's blood.

OLD SERVANT.

What power have they upon the life of man?

KREUSA.

For death one, one for healing of disease. 1005

OLD SERVANT.

And hung them on the child—wherein enclosed?

KREUSA.

A golden clasp. He gave it to my sire.

OLD SERVANT.

And, when Erechtheus died, to thee it passed?

KREUSA.

Yea; and I bear it ever on my wrist.

OLD SERVANT.

How is the Goddess' gift twofold ordained? 1010

KREUSA.

Each drop that welled forth from the hollow vein—

OLD SERVANT.

To what serves this? What virtue beareth it?

KREUSA.

Averts diseases, fostereth the life.

OLD SERVANT.

The second thou hast named—what doeth it?

KREUSA.

Slayeth: 'tis venom of the Gorgon's snakes. 1015

OLD SERVANT.

Mingled in one, or several, dost thou bear it?

KREUSA.

Several: good with evil blendeth not.

OLD SERVANT.

O child, O darling, thou hast all thy need!

KREUSA.

Hereby the lad shall die, the slayer thou.

OLD SERVANT. [1020

Where?—by what deed? Thou tell, and I will dare.

KREUSA.

In Athens, when he cometh to mine home.

OLD SERVANT.

Thou say'st not well.—Nay, thou didst blame my rede.¹

¹ In answer to her movement of impatience at his criticism of her plan.

KREUSA.

Ha, doth thine heart's misgiving jump with mine?

OLD SERVANT.

Thou shouldst be murderess held, though innocent.

KREUSA.

Even so—the old tale of stepdame's jealousy. 1025

OLD SERVANT.

Here slay him—now : so shall avail denial.

KREUSA.

At least I shall the sooner taste that joy.

OLD SERVANT.

Nor thy lord know thy knowledge of his secret.

KREUSA.

Know'st then thy part ? Receive thou from mine hand
Athênê's golden vial, wrought of old. 1030

Go where my lord holds this false sacrifice ;

And, in the banquet's pause, when men will pour

Wine to the Gods, this have thou 'neath thy robes,

And swiftly drop into the stripling's cup,—

That for his drinking, not the general bowl,—¹ 1035

Even his who seeks to lord it o'er mine house.

¹ There is no sufficient reason for omitting this line, in which the natural tenderness of the woman breaks out. Contrast the wholesale slaughter hinted at by the suitors in *Odyssey* ii. 330 ; and compare Brutus's answer to the question, " Shall no man else be touched but only Cæsar ? " *Jul. Cæs.* ii. 1.

If once it pass his lips, ne'er shall he come
To glorious Athens: here shall he stay—dead.

OLD SERVANT.

Unto thine host's house now withdraw thy foot;
And I through mine appointed task will toil. 1040
Come, agèd foot, for deeds must thou grow young,
Though this be not by time vouchsafed to thee.
On, with thy mistress on, against the foe!
Help her to slay and cast him forth her home.
Fair faith?—O yea, fair faith for fortune fair: 1045
But, when ye would wreak vengeance on your foes,
There is no law that lieth in the path.

[*Exeunt Kreusa and Old Servant.*]

CHORUS.

(*Str. 1*)

Goddess of Highways, Demeter's Daughter,
Queen of the nightmare darkness-ranger,
Guide thou the hand that for noontide slaughter 1050
Shall fill up the chalice, my lady's avenger,
Which beareth the venom-gouts that fell
From the neck of the Gorgon, the fiend of hell,
My lady's greeting-gift to the stranger
That usurpeth Erechtheus' royal sway,
That an alien of alien strain in our Athens never may
reign, 1060
But the noble Erechtheïds—none save they!

(*Ant. 1*)

But—the death unaccomplished?—the deed unabettèd

1 Hekatê, (here, as elsewhere, identified with Persephonê,) goddess of sorcery and secret poisoning (and so invoked by Medea, 394-6). She haunted places where roads crossed each other, and at night sent up demons and phantoms from Hades.

Of the hour, and my mistress's purposes ended,
 And the hopes that upbore her?—remains the sword
 whetted ;
 Remaineth the neck in the death-noose suspended ;
 And, by agony ending the agony-strife,
 Shall she pass to the life beyond this life.
 For never this queen from kings descended [1070
 Shall endure that the splendour-light of her eyne,
 No, not while she liveth, should fall on the shame of
 the ancient hall
 Ruled by the upstart of alien line.
(Str. 2)
 Shame for the God oft-chanted¹
 In hymns, if *he*,²
 Beside the fountains haunted
 Of dances, see
 With eyes long held from sleep
 That Twentieth Dawn upleap,
 See the torch-river's sweep, ere darkness flee,

 When dances heaven star-glancing³
 Adoringly,

¹ Dionysus, or Bacchus, who, in the Eleusinian Mysteries here referred to, was worshipped along with Demeter and Persephonê. The 20th of the month Boëdromion (about beginning of October) was the great day of the feast, and was ushered in by a vast torch-light procession (of 30,000 persons sometimes) conducting with dances the statue of Bacchus along the sacred road. In this procession those newly initiated into the mysteries, and who had kept vigil in the temple the night before, joined.

² Ion, whose presence, as that of an alien by blood, would be profanation, yet whose initiation could, as a matter of policy, not be avoided.

³ The very elements were said to unite in this dance-worship of the Mighty Mother and her Daughter.

When the white moon is dancing, 1080
 And 'neath the sea
 The Nereids' dance enrings
 The eternal river-springs,
 And their full chorus sings Persephonê
 Gold-crowned, and our Earth-mother—
 Awful is she!—
 Shall *he* press in, that other,
 To sovranty?
 Shall not his hopes be foiled?—
 Where kings and heroes toiled,
 Shall that proud realm be spoiled, a vagrant's
 fee?

(Ant. 2)

Mark—ye whose strains of slander 1090
 Scourge evermore
 Woman in song, and brand her
 Wanton and whore,—
 How high in virtue's place
 We pass men's lawless race,
 Nor spit in viper-lays your venom-store;
 But let the Muse of taunting
 On men's heads pour
 Her indignation, chanting
 Her treason-lore;
 Sing of the outraged maid;
 Tell of the wife betrayed
 Of him who hath displayed his false heart's
 core,—

This son of Zeus,¹ who flouted 1100
 A queen's heart, sore

¹ Xuthus, descended through Aiolus from Zeus.

With childless hunger, scouted
Troth-plight of yore :
Her right aside he thrust,
And mocked a nation's trust
For one that to his lust this bastard bore !

Enter Servant in haste.

SERVANT.

Where, damsels, shall I light upon our mistress,
Erechtheus' daughter ? All throughout the town
Seeking her have I ranged, and find her not.

CHORUS.

What is it, fellow-thrall ? What hot-foot haste
Possesseth thee ? What tidings bearest thou ? 1110

SERVANT.

We are hunted ! Yea, the rulers of the land
Are seeking her, that she may die by stoning.

CHORUS.

Ah me ! what say'st thou ? Are we taken then
Plotting the secret murder of yon lad ?

SERVANT.

Yea, thou wilt share the doom—nor thou the last. 1115

CHORUS.

How were the hidden stratagems laid bare ?

SERVANT.

The assay of right to vanquish wrong the God
Discovered ; for he would not be defiled.¹

¹ *i.e.* by a murder within the temple-precincts.

CHORUS.

How?—I beseech thee suppliant, tell it out.
 For, knowing all, if I indeed must die, 1120
 Death should be easier—yea, or sweeter life.

SERVANT.

Soon as Kreusa's lord had left the fane
 Of Phœbus, taking his new son with him,
 For that thanksgiving-feast and sacrifice,
 To where the Wine-god's Bacchic fire leaps up 1125
 Went Xuthus, to make wet with victims' blood
 Dionysus' twin rocks for the son new-found;
 And spake, "Abide now, son, and set thou up
 A wide-embracing tent by craftsmen's toil.
 If sacrificing to the Birth-gods long 1130
 I tarry, feast thy friends assembled there."
 So took the calves and went. And now the youth
 The unwall'd pavilion's compass solemnly
 With tall masts reared, and fenced with heed therefrom
 The javelins of the sun, his midnight flame, 1135
 And in like wise the beams of dying day.
 A hundred feet he meted out foursquare,—
 Having for compass of its space within
 Ten thousand, as the cunning craftsmen say,—¹

¹ The commentators conspire to reject these two lines, which yet convey a delightful touch of nature. The man has been watching the workmen, and comes away impressed less by their manual skill, which he could understand, than by what he regarded as their mastery of scientific principles (οἱ σοφοὶ), which was far beyond him. His retailing the information to his fellow-servants is another natural touch, the γὰρ being a bit of quiet humour—"inside, that is, you know"—as though he too had gained some tincture of scientific accuracy. So have we seen boys retailing to their

As bidding to the feast all Delphi's folk. 1140
 With sacred tapestries from the treasures
 He screened it, marvellous for men to see.
 First with a canopy of shawls he ceiled it,
 The offering of Zeus' son, which Herakles
 Brought to the God, the Amazonian spoils. 1145
 Therein were webs of woven blazonry :—
 Heaven shepherding his stars in folds of air :
 His steeds the Sun drave to their goal of fire,
 After him drawing the bright Evening Star.
 And sable-vestured Night with team of twain 1150
 Upfloated ; and the stars companioned her.
 The Pleiad swam her mid-sky path along,
 And sword-begirt Orion ; and, above,
 The Bear's tail wheeled around the gold-gemmed sphere.
 The Moon's full circle of the parted month 1155
 Shot silver shafts : the Hyads, surest sign
 To shipmen ; and the Light-uplifter, Dawn,
 Chasing the star-rout. And upon the walls
 Draped he yet other orient tapestries :
 Galleys with oars that charged on ships of Greece, 1160
 Monsters half-brute, steeds flying in the chase,
 Huntings of stags and lions of the wold.
 At the doors Kekrops coiling spire on spire
 Amidst his daughters—some Athenian's gift
 Of worship. In the banquet's midst he set 1165

wide-eyed fellows the number of cubic feet in an excavation, or of bricks in a building, with immense respect for the workman whose "one small head could carry all he knew." Shakespeare knew, as well as Euripides, that mental arithmetic is beyond these simple souls—"Let me see : every 'leven wether — tods ; every tod yields — pound and odd shilling ; fifteen hundred shorn,—what comes the wool to ? —I cannot do't without counters." (*Winter's Tale*, IV, ii).

The golden bowls. Forth stately pacing then
A herald cried, "What Delphian will soe'er,
Come to the feast!" And when the tent was thronged,
With garlands crowned they satisfied their souls
With plenteous meat. And when they would no more,
An old man entered in, and in their midst [1170
Stood, and to laughter loud the feasters stirred,
Meddling unasked. He drew from drinking ewers
Water for cleansing hands; for incense burnt
Balsam of myrrh, and of the golden cups 1175
Took charge—yea, laid this office on himself.
But when the flutes 'gan play, and mazer-bowls
Were mixed, the greybeard spake, "Take hence forth-
right

These tiny wine-cups—ample beakers bring,
That my lords' hearts the sooner may be merry." 1180
Then toiled we bearing goblets silver-chased
And golden; and he took a chosen one,
As rendering worship to his new-made lord,
And gave the chalice brimmed, first casting in
The drug death-working, which our mistress gave, 1185
Men say, that her new son might leave the light.
None marked;—but as the god-discovered heir
Raised with the rest the God's cup in his hand,
He heard some servant speak a word unmeet.
He, temple-reared, perfect in bodement lore, 1190
Held it for ominous, bade fill up with wine
Another bowl; that first drink-offering
He cast to earth, and bade all do the like.
Then fell a hush. With water brimmed we up
And Bybline wine the sacred mixing-bowls. 1195
Then midst our toils a flight of doves dropt down
In the pavilion; for in Loxias' halls

Unfrayed they dwell, and when men spilled the wine,
 The thirsty innocents dipped their beaks therein,
 And drew it down their dainty-feathered throats. 1200
 And none the God's libation harmed—save one :
 But she lit where the new heir spilled the wine.
 She sipped the drink—her dainty-feathered frame
 Quivered and staggered : an unmeaning scream¹
 She shrilled of anguish : marvelled all the throng 1205
 Of banqueters to see her agonies.
 One fierce convulsion—the pink claws uncramped ;
 And she was dead. That child of prophecy
 Bared of his robe his limbs, leapt o'er the board,
 Shouting " Who goeth about to murder me ? 1210
 Old man, declare !—thine was the eager zeal,—
 Yea, from thine hand did I receive the cup ! "
 He clutched his withered arm, he searched him o'er
 To take the ancient in the very fact.
 Detected, under strong constraint he told 1215
 Kreusa's desperate deed, the poison-plot.
 Straightway, the feasters with him, hurries forth
 The stripling given by Loxias' oracle,
 Before the Pythian nobles stands, and cries,
 " O hallowed land, by poison is my death 1220
 Sought of Erechtheus' child, the alien dame ! "
 Then Delphi's kings by general vote decreed
 That from the precipice hurled my queen should die,
 As compassing a priest's death, planning murder
 Within the Precinct. All the city seeks her 1225
 Who sped on wretched mission wretchedly.
 Drawn by desire of babes to Phœbus' fane,
 She hath lost her life and children therewithal.

¹ The ordinary note of the bird was significant in augury.

CHORUS.

There is no hiding-place from death for me,
 None : woe is me, it is the end ! 1230
 All is laid bare for all men's eyes to see—
 The cup, the murder-blend
 Of gout of viper-blood swift for life's quelling,
 Mid Bacchus' clusters shed ;
 Drink-offering—yea, to them in darkness dwelling,
 Gods of the dead.

Ruin is my life's portion—ah, *her* doom !
 Stones raining death upon my queen !
 Oh had I wings, or could but plunge to gloom
 Under the earth, to screen
 Mine head from horror of the stones down-beating !
 Oh, borne on four-horsed car, 1240
 To hear the hurrying hoofs !—to see waves fleeting
 Astern afar !

There is no hope,—except a God befriending
 Should snatch us from men's sight.
 O hapless queen, upon thy life what ending
 Of agony shall light !
 O God ! is justice' sword on *us* descending,
 Who thought to smite ?

Enter Kreusa in haste.

KREUSA.

Maidens, I am chased : the blood-hounds are upon my
 track to slay ; 1250
 For the Pythian vote hath doomed me, given me up to
 be their prey !

CHORUS.

Hapless queen, we know it, know the ruin overshadowing thee.

KREUSA.

Whither fly? What refuge? Scarce from forth the house my feet could flee
Ere the death rushed in. Through throngs of foemen slipt I stealthily.

CHORUS.

What thy refuge save the altar?

KREUSA.

How shall this avail my need? 1255

CHORUS.

Impious 'tis to slay the suppliant.

KREUSA.

Yet the law my death decreed.

CHORUS.

Ay, but first their hands must hold thee.

KREUSA.

Lo, the swords!—they come, the feet
Of the ministers of death!

CHORUS.

Upon the altar take thy seat.

For, if here they slay thee, shall thy blood to heaven
for vengeance call

On the murderers.

[*Kreusa seats herself on the altar, grasping
it with her hands.*]

So :—and now to bear what fate soe'er befall. 1260

Enter Ion with armed men followed by a crowd.

ION.

O form bull-shapen of her sire Kephisus,¹
What viper of thy blood is this, or what
Dragon up-glaring murderous flame of fire !
Full of all hardihood, not less fell she is [1265
Than Gorgon's blood wherewith she sought my death.
Seize her !—Parnassus' jagged terraces
Shall card the dainty tresses of her hair
When quoitwise down the rocks she shall be hurled.
O grace of fortune, ere to Athens town
I came, and fell beneath a stepdame's power ! 1270
Begirt with friends I sounded thy soul's depths,
Knew thee my bane, and measured all thine hate.
For, had thy nets been staked around me there,
Me with one fling thou hadst hurled to Hades' halls.
Nay—not the altar, not Apollo's house 1275
Shall save thee ! Ruth for thee !—Rather for me
And for my mother :—though she be afar
In body, ever her name is in mine heart.
See her, vile monster ! Webs on webs of guile

¹ Praxithea, Kreusa's mother, was grand-daughter of this River-god. River-gods were represented under the form of a bull, perhaps from the impetuous rush of their streams. The short rivers of Greece all became rushing mountain-torrents in winter.

She weaves ! At Phœbus' altar hath she crouched,
As though she should not suffer for her deeds ! [1280

Beckons to the guards, who advance irresolutely.

KREUSA.

I warn thee, slay me not—in mine own cause,
And the God's cause, upon whose floor we stand !

ION.

Phœbus—and thou ! What part hast thou in Phœbus ?

KREUSA.

Myself I give to the God, a sacred thing. 1285

ION.

Sacred ?—and poison the God's minister !

KREUSA.

Thou, thou wert none of Loxias', but thy sire's.

ION.

His I became while father I had none.

KREUSA.

Ay, then :—now, I am his, thou his no more.

ION.

Blasphemer !—his ? His reverent child was I. 1290

KREUSA.

I did but seek to slay mine house's foe.

ION.

I came not sword in hand against thy land.

KREUSA.

No?—Thou wouldst set Erechtheus' halls aflame.

ION.

Yea? With what brands or with what flame of fire?

KREUSA. [1295

In mine house wouldst thou dwell, take mine by force.

ION.

Take?—my sire *gives* the land that he hath won.

KREUSA.

What part have Aiolus' sons in Pallas' land?

ION.

He was her saviour—and with arms, not words.

KREUSA.

Should allies in possession take the land!

ION.

So thou wouldst slay for fear of what might fall? 1300

KREUSA.

Ay, lest thou fall upon me, and I die.¹

¹ See lines 846-849.

ION.

Childless, dost grudge my father finding me ?

KREUSA.

What, shalt thou seize all childless parents' homes ?

ION.

Had I no part at least in my sire's wealth ?

KREUSA. [1305

His wealth !—a shield and spear. Take that thine is.

ION.

Hence !—leave the altar and the hallowed seat !

KREUSA.

Thy mother teach her part, where'er she be.

ION.

Shalt thou not suffer, who wouldst murder me ?

KREUSA.

Yea—if thou dare to slay me mid the shrines.

ION.

What joy hast thou mid Phœbus' wreaths to die ? 1310

KREUSA.

One shall I vex of whom I was sore vexed.

ION.

Out upon this !

Shame, that a God ordained unrighteous laws

For mortals, statutes not in wisdom framed !
Never should crime have altar-sanctuary,
But hounding thence. Unmeet it is that hands 1315
Sin-stained should touch the Gods : but righteous men,
Whoso is wronged, should claim their sanctuary,
And not the good and evil come alike
Hither to win the same boon of the Gods.

*Enter the Pythia, bearing a cradle, the contents of which
are concealed by a wrapping which partially envelopes it.*

PYTHIA.

Forbear, my son. The seat of prophecy 1320
I leave, and step across this temple-fence,
Priestess of Phœbus, chosen of Delphi's daughters
To guard his tripod's immemorial use.

ION.

Hail, dear my mother, though thou bar'st me not.

PYTHIA.

So was I called ; nor did the name mislike me. 1325

ION.

Hast heard of yonder woman's plot to slay me ?

PYTHIA.

I heard : yet is thy ruthlessness all wrong.

ION.

Shall I not pay death-wage to murderers ?

PYTHIA.

To stepsons from of old have wives been foes.

ION.

Yea, I withal of stepdames have foul wrong. 1330

PYTHIA.

Ah hush !—Thou leav'st the fane, thou farest home—

ION.

What must I do then at thy counselling ?

PYTHIA.

With clean hands and fair omens go to Athens.

ION.

Clean are the hands of whoso slays his foes.

PYTHIA.

Nay, nay !—but hear the tale I bring to thee. 1335

ION.

Speak : it shall come of love, whate'er thou say.

PYTHIA.

Seest thou this chest that's cradled in mine arms ?

ION.

I see an ancient ark with fillets dight.

PYTHIA.

In this I found thee once, a new-born babe.

ION.

[1340

What say'st thou ? Strange the story hither brought !

PYTHIA.

Yea, I kept silence. I reveal it now.

ION.

Why hide so long whom thou didst find that day?

PYTHIA.

The God would have thee minister in his house.

ION.

Nor needeth now?—How shall I know it so?

PYTHIA.

Showing thy sire, he sends thee forth the land. 1345

ION.

Thou, by commandment keptest thou these things?

PYTHIA.

On that day Loxias put it in mine heart—

ION.

To do what deed? Say on, tell out the tale.

PYTHIA.

To keep this treasure-trove against this day.

ION.

What profit or what hurt hath this for me? 1350

PYTHIA.

This hides the swaddling-bands that wrapped thee then.

ION.

My mother!—clues be these for finding her?

PYTHIA.

Yea, 'tis the God's will now—not heretofore.

ION.

O day of blessed revelations this!

PYTHIA.

Take them—rest not until thou find thy mother, 1355
Though thou search Asia through, search Europe's
bounds:

Thou shalt not err, thou. For the God's own sake
I nursed thee, son: these give I back to thee,
Which his unspoken will then made me take
And guard. Why thus he willed I cannot tell: 1360
But none of mortal men was ware that I
Had these, nor hidden in what place they lay.
Farewell . . . for as a mother kiss I thee.

*Turns to go, but resumes—*¹

Where thou shouldst seek thy mother, there begin—
First, did a Delphian bride unwedded bear 1365
And cast thee forth upon these temple-steps?
Then, any maid of Greece? . . . So hast thou all
Of me, and Phœbus, pilot of thy fate. [*Exit.*]

¹ Editors are inclined to reject 1364-8. "The priestess . . . now that she has said good-bye, is little likely to revert to the subject again in five tame and prosaic verses." Is it not rather a touch of nature—the immemorial feminine postscript, conveying the most important part, the real business part, of the communication? May not Euripides have known woman—how in her the emotional is apt to precede the practical,—at least as well as some of his modern critics?

ION.

Ah me, mine eyes are drowned in streaming tears,
 As leaps my thought to that day when the bride 1370
 Betrayed, who bare, by stealth to thralldom sold me,¹
 Nor ever suckled me ; but nameless all
 In the God's courts I lived a servant's life.
 Kind was the God's part, but my fortune's hand
 Heavy ; for while I should of right have lain 1375
 Soft in a mother's arms, and known life's joy,
 Of a sweet mother's care was I bereft.
 O hapless she who bare me, who hath suffered
 Like me, hath lost the joys of motherhood !
 But this ark will I bear unto the God, 1380
 An offering—lest I find aught I would not.
 For, if perchance a slave-girl gave me birth,
 'Twere worse to find a mother than let be.
 Phœbus, I offer this unto thy fane ;—
 What ails me ? Lo, I fight against the favour 1385
 Of Him which saved for me my mother's tokens !
 This must I open, face what must be faced ;
 For never can I overstep my doom.
 Ah, sacred fillets, what have ye hid for me,
 O bands wherein mine heart's desire was kept ? 1390
 Lo, the enwrapping of the ark's fair curve,
 How by a miracle it waxed not old ;
 The osier-plaitings mouldless !—yet long time
 Since then hath o'er these treasure-relics passed.

KREUSA.

What, O what vision see I, past all hope ! 1395

¹ The reference seems to be to the selling of a child by its nurse to kidnappers (as in the *Odyssey* xv, 450-4), to which, in its consequences to himself, his exposure furnished a parallel.

ION.

Peace !—for thou canst be silent—as the grave.¹

KREUSA.

Not for me silence !—Teach not me my part !
 I see the ark wherein I set thee forth,—
 Thee, O my child, my babbling baby then,—
 In Kekrops' cave, beneath the Long Cliff's brow ! 1400
 This altar will I leave, yea, though I die.

[*Flings her arms round his neck.*

ION.

Seize her !—she hath been driven god-distraught
 To leave the carven altar !—Bind her arms.

KREUSA.

Slay on—spare not—for I will cling, will cling
 To this, and thee, and what is hidden there. 1405

ION.

Foul outrage ! I am kidnapped by her tongue !

KREUSA.

No, no !—but found, O love, of her that loves !

¹ Retaining the reading of the MSS. (*σιγᾶν σὺ πολλὰ . . . οἶσθά*), and understanding it to refer to her previous (*πάρουθεν*) absolute (*πολλὰ*) secrecy in plotting, which, as he had cause to know (*μοι*), had so nearly proved fatal to him. Paley's emendation—"Silence !—my foe thou art as heretofore," undoubtedly gives a clear and relevant sense, (as resenting an impertinent intrusion), but is a less direct and telling reference to his ever-present burning sense of wrong, to which he continually recurs, as in 1286, 1300, 1308, 1326, 1408.

ION.

I thy beloved—whom thou wouldst slay by stealth !

KREUSA.

Yes—yes ! my son !—Is aught to parents dearer ?

ION.

Cease !—I shall take thee mid thy webs of guile— 1410

KREUSA.

Take me ?—ah take ! I strain thereto, my child.

ION.

Void is this ark, or somewhat doth it hide ?

KREUSA.

Yea, that which wrapped thee when I cast thee forth.

ION.

Speak out and name them ere thine eyes behold.

KREUSA.

Yea, if I tell not, I submit to die. 1415

ION.

Say on :—'tis passing strange, thy confidence !

KREUSA.

See there the web I wove in girlhood's days.

ION.

Its fashion ?—girls be ever weaving webs.

KREUSA.

No perfect work ; 'twas but a prentice hand.

ION.

The pattern tell :—thou shalt not trick me so. 1420

KREUSA.

A Gorgon in the mid-threads of a shawl.

ION (*aside*).

O Zeus, what weird is this that dogs our steps ?

KREUSA.

'Tis fringed with serpents—with the Aegis-fringe.

ION.

Behold ! (*lifts and spreads it forth.*)

This is the web :—lo, here the oracle !

KREUSA.

O work of girlhood's loom, so long unseen ! 1425

ION.

Is there aught else ?—or this thy one true shot ?

KREUSA.

Serpents, an old device, with golden jaws—¹

ION.

Athêné's gift, who biddeth deck babes so ?

¹ So the MSS. Paley suggests *πάγχρυσον γάνος*—"an ancient golden ornament" : Verrall, *γένη*—"an old badge of our golden (*i.e.*, glorious) race."

KREUSA.

Moulded from Erichthonius' snakes of old.

ION.

What use, what purpose, tell me, hath the jewel? 1430

KREUSA.

A necklace for the new-born babe, my child.

ION.

Even these be here. The third I long to know.

KREUSA.

A wreath of olive set I on thee then :

Athênê brought it first unto our rock.

If this be there, it hath not lost its green, 1435

But blooms yet, from the sacred olive sprung.

ION.

Mother !—dear mother !—glad, O glad, I fall,
Beholding thee, on thy cheeks gladness-flushed.

KREUSA.

Child !—light to mother better than the sun—

He will forgive¹—I have thee in mine arms, 1440

Unhoped treasure-trove !—as a dweller in Hades, so
thought I of thee,

An abider mid nethergloom shades with Persephonê.

ION.

Ah no, dear mother mine ; within thine arms

Revealed is he that liveth and was dead.

¹ The Sun-god will pardon the apparent slight.

KREUSA.

Ho ye, ye unfoldings of ether, ye sunlit expanses, 1445
In what cry shall I peal out my rapture? O whence
unto me
Came it, this sweetness undreamed of? By what
strange chances
Such bliss do I see?

ION.

Nought were so strange, but I had looked for that,
O mother, rather than to know me thine. [1450

KREUSA.

Still I tremble with dread—

ION.

Lest holding thou hold me not?

KREUSA.

I had seen hope flee
So long ago!
O prophetess, whence and O whence to thine arms
came he,
My little one?
Upborne by what hand unto Loxias' halls was he sped?

ION.

A miracle: but through our lot to be
May we be happy as our past was sad.

SUPPLIANTS.

KREUSA.

In a bridal from all men hid was I wed.

ION.

Say on : glad tidings this and fortune fair ! 1485

KREUSA.

And the months swept round, till the tenth month
came,
And I bare unto Phœbus a child of shame.

ION.

O happy words, if this thou say'st be true !¹

KREUSA.

And these, these mother's swathing-bands
About thee cast, my maiden hands 1490
Wrought, my loom's skillless fashionings.
Nor to thy lips for suck I gave
The breast, nor with mine hands did lave :
But forth into a lonesome cave,
A banquet-spoil for swooping wings, 1495
To Hades thee thy mother flings.

ION.

O mother, what horror to do, to dare !

KREUSA.

I was thrall unto terror—I flung away

¹ Now, by this light, were I to get again,
Madam, I would not wish a better father. . . .
With all my heart I thank thee for my father !
King John, I, i.

Thy life, my baby : I steeled me to slay
When mine heart was moaning " Spare ! " 1500

ION.

And of me nigh slain !—foul horror it were !

KREUSA.

O fearful chances of that dark day,
And of this withal ! We are tossed to drift
On the surge of calamity hither and thither ; 1505
Yet anon do the winds of heaven shift,
And behold, we are gliding through summer
weather !

Oh may it last !—for the ills overpast should surely
suffice.

Fair winds, my son, now are wafting us on, after
stormy skies.

CHORUS.

Let none e'er deem aught in the lot of man 1510
Past hope, who marketh what to-day befalls.

ION.

O Fortune, thou that shiftest countless mortals
Unto misfortune, and anon to weal,
Lo, to what fearful pass came we, that I
Should slay my mother, should endure like wrong ! 1515
Ah strange !

Yet—midst the bright embraces of the sun
Somewhere such things day after day befall !
Sweet, mother, is my treasure-trove of thee ;
And this my birth, I find no fault therein.
Yet somewhat would I say to thee apart. 1520

KREUSA.

At thy birth-travail, O my child, was there many a
tear :

Thou wert torn from the arms of thy mother with
many a moan :

And now on thy cheeks is my breath : my darling is
here ! 1460

The uttermost bliss of the Blessèd, lo, now have I
known !

ION.

Thou speakest for mine heart and thine, as one.

KREUSA.

No more are we childless, no more unto barrenness
banned :

The home hath the hearth-glow again, and her kings
hath the land.

The strength of his youth doth Erechtheus renew :
The house of the Earth-born Race no longer to night-
ward shall gaze,
But the sun's beam cleaveth its darkness through.

ION.

Mother, my sire is here : let him too share
This happiness which I have given to you.

KREUSA.

O child, child, what sayest thou ?—must the shame be
laid bare of thy mother ? 1470

ION.

What is this thou hast said ?

KREUSA.

Of another thou camest—oh, of another !

ION.

Woe's me ! a bastard ?—child of maiden's shame ?

KREUSA.

No torches were gleaming, no raiment outstreaming
In the dance, my child, for the bridal bed
Which brought to the birth thy dear-loved head !

ION.

Alas ! base-born am I ?—O mother, whence ?

KREUSA.

Be witness the Gorgon-slaying Maid—

ION.

What is this ?—what meaneth the word thou hast
said ?

KREUSA.

Who hath set on my watch-tower crags her throne
On the hill with her olives overgrown,— 1480

ION.

Dark sayings are these, and I cannot interpret the thing.

KREUSA.

Unto Phœbus beside the rock where the nightingales
sing—

ION.

What should of Phœbus by thee be said ?

Who deigned not to reveal him to your sight,
Else must he chide you for things overpast,¹
But sendeth me to tell to you his words :—
Thee this queen bare, begotten of Apollo : 1560
He gives to whom he gave, not that they gat thee,
But for thy bringing home to a princely house.
But, when the matter was laid bare and told,
Fearing lest thou shouldst of her plot be slain,
And she of thee, saved thee by that device. 1565
Now the God would have kept the secret hid
Until in Athens he revealed her thine,
And thee the son of her and Phœbus born.
But—to make end, and tell his oracles,
For which I yoked my chariot, hearken ye. 1570
Take this thy son, and go to Kekrops' land,
Kreusa, and on thrones of sovereignty
Seat him ; for, of Erechtheus' lineage sprung,
Worthy he is to rule o'er mine own land.
Famed shall he be through Hellas ; for the sons 1575

¹ For unfaith and impatient interference with his providential dealings: Kreusa, in particular, for her hasty upbraidings and her attempt at murder; Ion, for proposing to violate the right of sanctuary. The result was to thwart Apollo's design of bringing about a happy issue in his own good time. But to chide them at this juncture would have entailed that mingling in one communication of good (promises) and evil (rebukes) which the Greeks with religious scrupulosity avoided. The interpretation which assumes that Apollo was afraid lest *he* should be chidden by those whose lives he was crowning with blessing, by two Greeks whose reverential awe made them fear even to gaze on divinity, is little in harmony with Ion's own words in ll. 370-373, and with the fact that the whole plot of the "Andromache" turns on the vengeance visited by Apollo on Neoptolemus, despite his repentance, for having presumed to upbraid him for a far deeper and more irreparable wrong.

Born to him, even four from this one root,
Shall give their names unto the several tribes
Of the land's folk which dwell upon mine hill.
Teleon the first shall be ; the second tribe
Hoplêtes ; Argades the third : the fourth, 1580
One tribe, of my shield named Aegikores.
And their sons in the fulness of the time
Shall found them cities in the Cyclad Isles,
And seaboard realms, for strength unto my land.
Yea, they shall people either mainland's plains 1585
On either side the strait, of Asia-land
And Europe : and because of thy son's name
Ionians shall be named, and win renown.
From Xuthus too and thee a seed shall spring,
Dorus, of whom shall Doris song-renowned 1590
Arise : the second goeth to Pelops' land,
Achaius ; o'er the seaboard shall he reign,
Nigh Rhion, and the people of his name
Among the nations shall be sealed therewith.
Well hath Apollo all things done : for, first, 1595
He gave thee health in travail ; so none knew :
And, when thou hadst born this child, and cast him out
In swaddling-bands, bade Hermes in his arms
Snatch him away, and hither waft thy babe ;
And nurtured him, nor suffered him to die. 1600
Now therefore say not that this lad is thine,
That Xuthus in his phantasy may joy,
And thine the substance, lady, be of bliss.
Farewell ye : after this relief from woes
I bring you tidings of a happy lot. 1605

ION.

Pallas, Daughter of the Highest, child of Zeus, we
will receive

Come hither : I would speak it in thine ear,
And fold about with darkness that thy past :—
See to it, mother, lest thy steps have slipped,
As maids infatuate yield to love—to shame,
And now thou chargest this upon the God, 1525
And, striving to escape the shame of me,
Phœbus thou nam'st my sire, who sire was none.

KREUSA.

No!—by Athênê, Lady of Victory, who
With car and shield on the earth-born charged for Zeus,
No mortal man was sire to thee, my son, 1530
But he which reared thee, Loxias the King.

ION.

How gave he then his own son to another,
And named me Xuthus' son—begotten son ?

KREUSA.

Nay, not begotten ; but his gift art thou, [1535
Sprung from himself,—as friend to friend should give
His own son, that his house might have an heir.

ION.

Is the God true ?—or naught his prophecies ?
Mother, my soul it troubleth : well it may.

KREUSA.

Hear now what cometh to my mind, my son.
Of kindness Loxias giveth thee a place 1540
In a proud house : hadst thou been called his son,
Thou hadst had none inheritance thereof,
Nor a sire's name :—how couldst thou, when myself

Still hid his rape, yea, by thy secret death ?
Thee for thy good to another sire he gives. 1545

ION.

Nay, not thus lightly on the quest I press.¹
I will ask Phœbus, entering his fane,
"Am I of Loxias or a mortal sire ?"
Athênê appears above the temple in her chariot.
Ha ! high above the incense-breathing house
What God reveals a face that fronts the Sun ? 1550
Let us flee, mother, lest we gaze on Gods,
Except in season meet for that great vision.

ATHENE.

Fly not ; no foe am I that ye should flee ;
But as in Athens, so here, gracious-willed.
I come from thy land—land that bears my name : 1555
I Pallas from Apollo speed in haste,

¹ Ion is not to be satisfied with plausible conjecture : moreover, Kreusa may be under a delusion as to the cardinal fact. The counter-evidence is that of Xuthus, who had received an oracle which, according to his own version (ll. 536-7, where see note,) might be ambiguous, and whose evidence, owing to his haste and excitement (l. 541), was anything but conclusive. Ion himself had reluctantly accepted it only when cross-questioning elicited that there was room for it in Xuthus' past history. The settlement of the doubt expressed in ll. 1537-8 turned entirely on the value of Xuthus' evidence, on the accuracy of his conclusions ; for men's faith in the oracle was never shaken by the often intentionally ambiguous nature of its responses, Ion's familiarity with which made him prompt to discount an enquirer's own impression (l. 533). Hence, Ion would be, as he afterwards is, quite satisfied with an authoritative divine declaration on a matter in which there is (l. 1608) no inherent incredibility. I find no justification here for the theory that Euripides wrote this play to discredit the oracle.

ARGUMENT.

IN the days when Theseus ruled in Athens, there was war between Argos and Thebes. For the two sons of Oedipus, being mindful of their father's curse, that they should divide their inheritance with the sword, covenanted to rule in turn, year by year, over Thebes. So Eteokles, being the elder, became king for the first year, and Polyneikes his brother departed from the land, lest any occasion of offence should arise. But when after a year's space he returned, Eteokles refused to yield to him the kingdom. Then went he to Adrastus king of Argos, who gave him his daughter to wife, and led forth a host of war under seven chiefs against Thebes. But, forasmuch as in going he set at nought oracles and seers, his array was utterly broken in battle, and of those seven captains none returned, but Adrastus only. Thereafter, according to the sacred custom of Hellas, and the law of war, the Argives sent to require the Thebans to suffer them to bear away their slain that they might bury them. For, among the Greeks, if a man being dead obtained not burial, this was accounted a calamity worse than death, forasmuch as he was thereby made

homeless and accurst in Hades. Yet did the Thebans impiously and despitefully reject that claim, being minded to wreak vengeance on their enemies after death. Then king Adrastus, with the mothers of the slain chiefs, came to Eleusis in Attica, and made supplication at the altar of Demeter to Aithra the mother of Theseus, and to the king's self. So Theseus consented to their prayer, and led the array of Athens against Thebes, and there fought and prevailed, and so brought back the bodies of those chiefs, and rendered to them the death-rites at Eleusis.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

AITHRA, *mother of Theseus.*

THESEUS, *son of Aigeus, king of Athens.*

ADRASTUS, *king of Argos.*

HERALD *from Kreon king of Thebes.*

MESSENGER *from the army of Theseus before Thebes.*

EVADNE, *wife of Kapaneus one of the seven chiefs.*

IPHIS, *father of Evadne.*

SONS *of the slain chiefs.*

ATHENE, *Patron-goddess of Athens.*

CHORUS, *consisting of the mothers of the slain chiefs, with their Handmaids.*

Athenian herald, guards, attendants, Athenian soldiers.

SCENE:—In the forecourt of the temple of Demeter and Persephonê at Eleusis. The great altar stands in the midst.

These thy words with no unfaith, but Loxias do I believe
Sire to me, and her my mother :—never was this past belief.

KREUSA.

Hear me : Phœbus praise I, whom I praised not in mine
hour of grief,
For that whom he set at nought, his child, to me he
now restores. 1610
Lovely is his oracle, and fair to me these temple-doors,
Hateful though they were aforetime. Now unto the
portal-ring,
As I bid his gates my blithe farewell, with loving hands
I cling.

ATHENE.

Well dost thou to turn to praises of the God : so is it
still—
Slow the Gods' hands haply are, but mightily at last
fulfil. 1615

KREUSA.

Homeward let us pass, my son.

ATHENE.

Pass on : myself shall following come.

ION.

Best way-warden art thou !

KREUSA.

Thou who holdest dear our city-home.

ATHENE.

Seat thee on the ancient throne.

ION.

A goodly heritage is mine.

CHORUS.

Zeus' and Lêto's Son Apollo, hail ! Let him to powers
divineRender homage undismayed, whose house affliction's
buffets smite : 1620For the good at last shall overcome, at last attain their
right ;But the evil, by their nature's law, on good shall never
light.*[Exeunt in procession to marching music.]*

SUPLIANTS.

On the steps of the altar Aithra is seated ; and around her sit the members of the Chorus. The olive-boughs of suppliance lie upon the altar, and from these are stretched woollen fillets, attaching them to Aithra and the Chorus.

AITHRA.

DEMETER, warder of Eleusis-land,
And ye which keep and serve the Goddess' fanes,
To me and my son Theseus be propitious,
And unto Athens and to Pittheus' land,
Where my sire nursed me in a happy home, 5
Aithra, and gave me to Pandion's son
Aigeus, to wife, by Loxias' oracles.
Thus pray I as on these grey dames I look,
These which have left their homes in Argos-land,
And fall with suppliant bough before my knee, 10
Stricken with grievous stroke : for round the gates
Of Kadmus lying are their seven sons dead,
Sons of the childless, whom the Argive king
Adrastus led, in Oedipus' heritage
To win his share for Polyneikes exiled, 15
His daughter's lord. The mothers now of these,

Spear-slain, are fain to lay them in the grave,
Wherefrom the victors let them, and refuse
The corpses, setting the Gods' laws at nought.
Sharing the burden of their need of me, 20
Adrastus lieth here, his eyes with tears
Drowned, mourning for the battle-shivered spear
And that ill-starred array led forth of him.
Sore pleadeth he with me to bend by prayers
My son to be redeemer of the dead 25
By speech or spear, and helper to the grave,
Laying this charge alone upon my son
And Athens. Now it chanceth that I come
For the land's harvest's sake from forth mine halls
To this god's-acre, where first rose to light 30
Above this earth's face bristling ears of corn.
And, bound in this strong gossamer-chain of leaves,¹
At the two Goddesses' holy hearths I stay,
Demeter's and her Daughter's, both for ruth
Of these unchilded mothers silver-haired, 35
And awe of the holy bands. To Athens sped
Mine herald is, to summon Theseus hither,
That he may banish from the land these mourners,²
Or loose this strong constraint of suppliance
By rendering heaven its due. Seemly it is 40
That women, which be wise, still act through men.

¹ Lit. "a (real) chain which is (apparently) no chain." The woollen fillets and boughs could not be removed without sacrilege. Cf. "Those ties which, light as air though strong as iron, bind the colonies to the mother-land." *Burke*.

² The presence of such, especially at the temple of Demeter, was ominous of evil, which the king only could avert, either by granting their request, or by refusing it and ordering them to depart.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

Reverend Queen, with agèd lips do I implore thee;
 In my suppliance at thy knee I fall before thee.
 O redeem thou unto me from that assemblage of the
 dead

My belovèd, from the harvest that the hand of death
 hath spread

For the mountain-beasts to ravin on the children of
 my womb!

(Ant. 1)

Look upon me :—from mine eyes in my despairing
 Tears are streaming, and my frenzied hands are
 tearing

50

Crimson furrows on my wrinkled cheeks. What
 should I do but mourn,

Who have laid not out my dead unto their burial to be
 borne,

And who see not any heaping of the earth-mound for
 their tomb?

(Str. 2)

Thou hast born a little one, thou hast given a
 princely son

To thy lord, that marriage-treasure made his heart to
 joy in thee :

Let the full soul deal its bread to the sad ones
 famishèd :

Give according to the measure of my childless agony.

Bend the spirit of thy scion, that he come, whose help
 we crave,

60

To Ismenus, that he give them, goodly bodies of our
 dead,

To the arms of her that loveth, who shall lay them in
 the grave.

(Ant. 2)

Not according unto rite,¹ but as overmastering might
Of Necessity constraineth, at the altars do I bend

Whence to heaven leaps the flame ; and the right is
that I claim.

Thou art strong, thy son remaineth ; thou canst make
my sorrows end.

Out of depths of sorest anguish rings my supplication
wild

That thou give me but a corpse, in mine embrace to
hold the same,

And to fling mine arms around the piteous body of my
child. 70

*The attendant Handmaids, beating their breasts and
marring their faces, wail in unison with the Mothers.*

(Str. 3)

O hearken yon wails to our wailing replying,

To the hands of our handmaidens smiting hard
On their bosoms ! Come, ye that re-echo our crying
With a burden of mourning, who sigh with our
sighing—

Come ye to the one dance Death doth regard ;
Rend, rend ye the cheek, till the red stains streak
White fingers :—the dues that our dear dead seek
Shall be all our reward.

(Ant. 3)

Unsatisfied mourning my soul is enthralling

Sorrow-burdened, as forth from a precipice flows 80
A spring with its rain ever flashing and falling.

Unrestingly wailing to wailing is calling ;

For the heart's love of woman but one path knows,

¹ There was no place in the temple-ritual for mourning.

Nor can choose but to moan for the dear dead son :—
And oh that the days of my life were done,
And forgotten my woes !

Enter Theseus.

THESEUS.

What wailings heard I, smittings upon breasts,
And dirges for the dead, as rang the sound
From the holy place ? How throbs mine heart with
fear

Lest to my mother, who hath drawn me hither 90
By her long absence, some mischance betide.

Ha !

What see I here ? What strange tale is to tell ?
At the altar sitting my grey mother is,
And alien dames with her in diverse guise
Of sore affliction ; for the piteous tear 95
Unto the ground from agèd eyes they drop.
Shorn hair and garb unmeet for worshippers !
What means it, mother ? 'Tis thy part to tell,
And mine to hear. I look for some strange thing.

AITHRA.

My son, these dames the mothers are of those, 100
The chieftains seven, that in battle fell
By gates Kadmean. And with suppliant boughs
Compassèd they hold me, captive, as thou seest.

THESEUS.

Who yonder at the gates makes piteous moan ?

AITHRA.

Adrastus, as they tell, the Argive king. 105

THESEUS.

And yon lads at his side, his boys are they ?

AITHRA.

Nay, but the sons of those dead which have died.

THESEUS.

Wherefore to us came they with suppliant hand ?

AITHRA.

I know :—but these must tell the rest, my son.

THESEUS.

Thee, in thy mantle muffled close, I ask— 110
Unshroud thine head, speak, let thy mourning be ;
Nought shalt thou profit, if nought pass thy tongue.

ADRASTUS.

O triumph-glorious king of Athens' land,
Theseus, I come thy suppliant and thy city's.

THESEUS.

What seekest thou, and whereof hast thou need ? 115

ADRASTUS.

Thou know'st what host I to destruction led.

THESEUS.

Yea, not in silence passedst thou through Greece.

ADRASTUS.

The chiefest men of Argos lost I there.

THESEUS.

Such desolation worketh woeful war.

ADRASTUS.

And these my dead I went to ask of Thebes. 120

THESEUS.

Did heralds sanctify thy burial-claim ?

ADRASTUS.

Yea : even so the slayers grant them not.

THESEUS.

What say they to thy plea of holy right ?

ADRASTUS.

Ay, what ?—prosperity hath puffed them up.

THESEUS.

For counsel com'st thou then, or what wouldst thou ? 125

ADRASTUS.

That thou shouldst rescue, Theseus, Argos' sons.

THESEUS.

Where is your Argos ? Is her vaunting vain ?

ADRASTUS.

We are fallen and undone. To thee we come.

THESEUS.

Dost thou alone will this, or all thy state ?

ADRASTUS.

All Danaus' sons beseech thee entomb their dead. 130

THESEUS.

Why didst thou march those seven hosts to Thebes?

ADRASTUS.

To my two daughters' lords this grace I showed.

THESEUS.

Thy daughters? To what Argives gav'st thou them?

ADRASTUS.

With no man native-born I linked mine house.

THESEUS.

Ha! gavest thou to aliens Argive maids? 135

ADRASTUS.

To Tydeus, and to Thebes' son Polyneikes.

THESEUS.

Whence thy strong love for such affinity?

ADRASTUS.

Phœbus' dark saying wrought upon my mind.

THESEUS.

What spake Apollo to control their marriage?

ADRASTUS.

"Thy daughters give to a lion and a boar." 140

THESEUS.

And the God's precept how unfoldest thou ?

ADRASTUS.

There came by night two exiles to my gates.

THESEUS.

Who this, who that ?—for thou dost speak of twain.

ADRASTUS.

Tydeus and Polyneikes : there they fought.

THESEUS. [145

To these, as those wild beasts, gav'st thou thy daughters ?

ADRASTUS.

Yea : like those monsters twain, methought, they strove.

THESEUS.

How left they home-land's bounds, and came to thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Tydeus, for shedding blood of kin exiled.

THESEUS.

And Oedipus' son, for what cause left he Thebes ?

ADRASTUS.

His father's curse, lest he should slay his brother. 150

THESEUS.

Wise was that self-sought exile, named of thee.

ADRASTUS.

But they that tarried wrought the absent wrong.

THESEUS.

Ha ! did his brother take his heritage ?

ADRASTUS.

To claim his right I came : I was undone.

THESEUS.

Didst seek to seers, and gaze on altar-flames ? 155

ADRASTUS.

Ah me ! thou pressest me where most I erred !

THESEUS.

Not with heaven's blessing didst thou go, methinks.

ADRASTUS.

Nay, worse ; in Amphiaraus' despite I went.

THESEUS.

Didst thou thus lightly flout the will divine ?

ADRASTUS.

The clamour of the young men daunted me. 160

THESEUS.

Valour instead of wisdom favouredst thou.

ADRASTUS.

Even that hath ruined many a battle-chief.

O thou in prowess first all Hellas through,
 O king of Athens, sore ashamed am I
 To fall to earth, and to embrace thy knee, 165
 A grey-haired king in time past prosperous.
 Yet to mine evil plight I needs must bow.
 Save thou my dead, compassionate my woes,
 And these the mothers of the slaughtered sons
 Whom hoary eld hath found in childlessness; 170
 Who have endured to come, on alien soil
 To set their feet, who scarce for eld may creep;
 No mission to Demeter's mysteries,
 But seeking burial for their dead, a boon
 Themselves should have obtained of young strong
 hands.¹ 175
 Wisely doth wealth consider poverty :
 Wisely to wealth the poor uplifts his eyes
 Aspiring, that desire of good may spur him :
 So ought the prosperous to look on woe.
 [The poet's self in gladness should bring forth 180
 His offspring, song ; if he attain not this,
 He cannot from a heart distraught with pain
 Gladden his fellows : reason sayeth nay.]²
 Perchance thou askest, " Why pass by the land
 Of Pelops, and on Athens lay this charge ? " 185
 Sooth, right it is that I should answer this :—
 Sparta is heartless, never at one stay ;
 The rest be small and weak : but this thy burg
 Alone can stand beneath the mighty strain.
 'Twas ever pitiful, and hath in thee 190

¹ In the natural course of things, the mothers might have expected to be committed to the grave by their sons.

² Lines 180-183 are by most editors bracketed as an irrelevant interpolation.

A young and valorous chief, for lack of whom
To lead their hosts, have many cities fallen.

CHORUS.

I too put up to thee the selfsame prayer,
Theseus, to have compassion on my lot.

THESEUS.

With others oft in wrestle of argument 195
I have grappled touching this :—there be that say
That evil more abounds with men than good.
Opinion adverse unto these I hold,
That more than evil good abounds with men :
Were this not so, we were not of the light. 200
Praise to the God who shaped in order's mould
Our lives redeemed from chaos and the brute,
First, by implanting reason, giving then
The tongue, word-herald, to interpret speech ;¹
Earth's fruit for food, for nurturing thereof 205
Raindrops from heaven, to feed earth's fosterlings,
And water her green bosom ; therewithal
Shelter from storm, and shadow from the heat,
Sea-tracking ships, that traffic might be ours
With fellow-men of that which each land lacks ; 210
And, for invisible things or dimly seen,
Soothsayers watch the flame, the liver's folds,
Or from the birds divine the things to be.
Are we not arrogant then, when all life's needs
God giveth, therewith not to be content ? 215
But our presumption stronger fain would be
Than God : we have gotten overweening hearts,

¹ Cf. Horace, *Odes* I, x, 2-3.

And dream that we be wiser than the Gods.
 And thou art of this fellowship of folly,
 Who didst by Phœbus' hest thy daughters wed,¹ 220
 And gav'st to aliens, even as though Gods lived ;
 Yet, mingling thy clear blood with turbid, so
 Didst mar thine house : thou oughtest ne'er to have blent,
 So thou wert wise, just lives with lives unjust, [225
 But for thine house to have gotten heaven-blest friends :
 For God, adjudging fates joined hand in hand,²
 Destroyeth by the sinner's stroke whoe'er
 Partaketh with him, though he have not sinned.
 Thou leddest forth the Argives all to war,
 Though seers spake heaven's warning, sett'st at nought
 These, floutedst Gods,—so ruinedst thy state, [230
 By young men led astray, which love the praise
 Of men, and multiply wars wrongfully,
 Corrupting others, one, to lead the host,
 One, to win power, and use it for his lust, 235
 And one for lucre's sake, who recketh nought
 Of mischief to a people thus misused.
 For in a nation there be orders three :—
 The useless rich, that ever crave for more ;
 The have-nots, straitened even for sustenance, 240
 A dangerous folk, of envy overfull,
 Which shoot out baleful stings at such as have,
 Beguiled by tongues of evil men, their " champions " :
 But of the three the midmost saveth states ;
 They keep the order which the state ordains. 245

¹ The argument is, that, while recognizing the authority of the Gods in one matter, your daughters' marriage, you disregarded it in another ; for they had not told you also to bind up the fortunes of your house with those of the bridegrooms ; nay, they warned you against doing so.

² Cf. Horace, *Odes* III, ii, 29-30, and Prov. xiii, 20.

Shall I then make me ally unto thee ?
 How to my nation should I make defence ?
 Depart in peace : if thou hast ill devised,
 It must not be that thy fate drag us down.¹

CHORUS.

He erred ; yet on the young men lieth this : 250
 But meet it is that he find grace with thee.

ADRASTUS.

Not for a judge I chose thee of mine ills,
 But as to a healer of them, king, I came ;
 Nor, if I have calamitously sped,
 Need I thy chastisement and chiding, king. 255
 No, but thine aid. And if thou wilt not this,
 I must content me with thy choice :—what help ?
 Come, agèd dames, depart :—yet leave ye here
 The grey-green boughs to roof the altar o'er,²
 Calling to witness heaven and earth, Demeter, 260
 Fire-bearing Goddess, and the Sun-god's light,
 That nought our prayers unto the Gods availed.
 [On thine head be it, grandson thou of Pittheus]³
 Old Pelops' son !—Lo, we of Pelops' land
 The selfsame blood ancestral share with thee.

AITHRA.⁴

[265]

How ?—wilt thou flout these prayers, cast forth the land

¹ Reading, with Paley, οὐ δέι for αὐτός.

² If the petitioner's prayer was granted, he carried away with him his suppliant-bough ; if not, he left it on the altar.

³ A line inserted, to supply an obvious gap in the MSS., in accordance with Paley's suggestion.

⁴ Various assigned by other editors to Chorus, and to Adrastus.

Grey mothers, which have gained of their dues nought ?
 Nay, nay !—the beast finds refuge in the rock,
 The slave at the Gods' altars ; and a state
 Storm-tossed must cower beneath another's lee ;
 For in man's lot nought prospereth to the end. 270

CHORUS.

(Str.)

O thou afflicted, arise from Persephonè's hallowèd floor ;
 Rise thou, and bow at his knees, flinging round them
 thine hands, and implore
 That he rescue the clay of my dead, my belovèd—ah,
 woe is me, woe !—
 Of the sons I have lost, under ramparts of Kadmus in
 dust lying low.

(Mesode)

Woe for me !—clasp me, uplift me, help onward, up-
 holding 275

 The palsied hand of the woe-forspent !

By thy beard, O thou chiefest of champions of Hellas,
 O friend, I beseech thee,

 In the clasp of the wretched thy knees and thy
 fingers enfolding !

 Pity me, for my children in suppliance bent
 Like a beggar I bow : let my pitiful, pitiful outcryings
 reach thee !

(Ant.)

Ah, not unburied on Kadmus's soil, for a ravin and glee
 Unto beasts of the wold do thou leave them, the young
 men like unto thee !

O look on the tears from mine eyes that are streaming !
 —and all that I crave

Falling low at thy knees, is a grave—that thou win for
 my sons but a grave ! 285

THESEUS.

Mother, why weepest thou, before thine eyes
Casting thy fine-spun veil? Dost weep to hear
Their mournful wails? Sooth, mine own heart was
thrilled.

Raise thy white head; be not a fount of tears,
There sitting at Demeter's holy hearth. 290

AITHRA.

Ah me!

THESEUS.

'Tis not for thee to wail their woes,—

AITHRA.

Oh hapless dames!

THESEUS.

Thou art not of their blood.

AITHRA.

Son, may I speak for thine and Athens' honour?

THESEUS.

Yea, wisdom oft hath flowed from women's lips.

AITHRA.

Yet—yet, it gives me pause, the word I hide. 295

THESEUS.

Nay, this were shame, to hide from friends good rede.

AITHRA.

I will not hold my peace, to blame hereafter

Myself for coward silence of this day ;
 Nor by that taunt abashed, " that woman's best
 Is worthless," will refrain my lips from good. 300
 My son, I bid thee look to this first, lest
 Thou err, despising their appeal to heaven.
 In this alone thou err'st, in all else wise.
 Nay more—I had endured, and murmured not,
 Wert thou not *bound* to champion the oppressed : 305
 Lo, this is the foundation of thy fame.
 Therefore I fear not to exhort thee, son,
 That thou wouldst lay thy strong constraining hand
 On men of violence which refuse the dead
 The dues of burial and of funeral-rites, 310
 And quell the folk that would confound all wont
 Of Hellas : for the bond of all men's states
 Is this, when they with honour hold by law.
 Ay, some will say faint heart made feeble hand :
 'Twas thine to win for Athens glory's crown, 315
 Yet didst thou flinch for fear ; with that wild swine¹
 Thou grappledst in a strife of little toil ;
 But when behoved to face the helm, bear brunt
 Of the spear's point, a craven wert thou found.
 Ah, do not so, my son, as thou art mine ! 320
 Hast marked—bemocked for spiritless policy,
 How on the mockers glares with Gorgon eyes
 Thy country ?—in her energy is her life.
 But states which work in darkness, cautelous,
 Grope in the darkness, for their caution's meed. 325
 What, to the dead, and women misery-worn
 Wilt thou not bring help, son, in this their strait ?

¹ Phaia, the wild sow of Krommyon, slain by Theseus in his first journey to Athens.

I fear nought : justice is with thine assay ;
And, though the folk of Kadmus prosper now,
Far otherwise yet for them the dice of doom 330
Shall fall, I trust :—God bringeth low the proud.

CHORUS.

O best-beloved, well hast thou said, for him
And me alike ; herein is twofold joy.

THESEUS.

Mother, the words I spake were words of truth
Unto this man, wherein I showed my mind 335
Touching the counsels by the which he fell.
Yet these thy warnings—yea, I see their force,
That with my life's use it accordeth not
To flinch from peril. Many a glorious deed
Hath shown to sons of Hellas this my wont, 340
Ever to be a punisher of wrong.
Toil's challenge therefore cannot I refuse :
For what will they which hate me say of me,
When she that bare me—who, beyond all, fears
For me,—first bids me undertake this toil ? 345
I will unto the deed, redeem their dead
By fair words, if I may ; if not, the might
Of spears shall do it, nor the Gods shall grudge.
Yet I require all Athens' sanction here.
My wish should win their sanction ; yet, if I 350
Show cause withal, the loyaller shall they be.
For I have made the land one single realm,
A free state, with an equal vote for all.
Adrastus for my witness will I take,
And meet their concourse ; their consenting won, 355
With muster of chosen youths Athenian

Will I return ; and, tarrying under arms,
 Will send to Kreon, asking back the dead.
 But ye, grey women, from my mother take
 The holy wreaths, that I may clasp her hand, 360
 And lead to Aigeus' halls. A sorry son
 Is he that pays not service-debt to parents.
 Who giveth of love's best, by his own sons
 For all he hath given his parents is repaid.
(Exeunt Theseus and Aithra.)

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

O Argos, mead of the battle-steed, O land where my
 fathers abode of yore,
 Ye have heard it, have heard the changeless word
 of the hero-king,
 His sacred plight in Pelasgia's sight, the pledge to be
 published all Argos o'er.

(Ant. 1)

O may he gain—yea, more than attain to the goal that
 seeth my miseries end !
 Forth let him go, let him wrest from the foe, to the
 mother to bring 370
 Her darling's clay blood-stained, and for aye have our
 own dear Inachus' land to friend.

(Str. 2)

Memorial fair shall the cities share of the sacred labour
 of love : evermore
 The grace thereof shall abide, and the love aye
 lingering.

Ah, what shall come of their rede ?—what doom ?—
 shall Athens bestow the grace I implore ?
 Shall she league her might with me, and the right of
 the tomb to my slaughtered sons restore ?

(Ant. 2)

O Pallas' Town, for my help step down ; the holy
cause of the mother defend ;

So the laws of men shall be made not then a polluted
thing.

Thou reverencest great Justice' hest : injustice beneath
thy yoke shall bend ;

And through all the lands thy champion hands to the
helpless oppressed deliverance send. 380

Enter Theseus with Athenian Herald.

THESEUS.

O thou that usest still thine art to serve

Athens and me, wide publishing mine hests,

Pass thou Asopus and Ismenus' stream,

And to the proud Kadmean despot say :

"Theseus of grace asks corpses for the tomb : 385

He dwells thy neighbour, and he claims but right :

So make thou the Erechtheid folk thy friend."

If they consent to grant it, turn thou back.

If they refuse, my second message speak,

That for my shielded war-array they look. 390

Mine host is camped and marshalled hard at hand

By sacred Kallichorus for fight prepared.

Yea, Athens of good will, and glad withal,

Took up this task, made ware of my desire.

Ha !—breaking in upon my speech who comes ? 395

Theban, I deem, yet know not certainly :—

A herald !—stay : thy toil perchance is spared.

His coming meets my purpose in mid way.

Enter Theban Herald.

HERALD.

Your despot, who ?—To whom must I proclaim

The words of Kreon, lord of Kadmus' land 400
 Since Eteokles by the hand was slain
 Of Polyneikes by the sevenfold gates ?

THESEUS.

First, stranger, with false note thy speech began,
 Seeking a despot here.¹ Our state is ruled
 Not of one only man : Athens is free. 405
 Her people in the order of their course
 Rule year by year, bestowing on the rich
 Advantage none ; the poor hath equal right.

HERALD.

One vantage hast thou given me, as to one
 That playeth draughts :—the city whence I come 410
 By one man, not by any mob, is swayed.
 There is none there who, slaving them with talk,
 This way and that way twists them for his gain,
 Popular now, and humouring all their bent,
 Now an offence : but still fresh calumnies² 415
 Gloze past faults, and he slips through justice' net.
 How should the mob which reason all awry
 Have power to pilot straight a nation's course ?
 For time bestoweth better lessoning
 Than haste. But yon poor delver of the ground, 420
 How shrewd soe'er, by reason of his toil
 Can nowise oversee the general weal.
 Realm-ruining in the wise man's sight is this,

¹ Cf. *Henry V*, pt. 1, I, ii. Henry, in answer to first words of the ambassador of France, replies, "We are no tyrant, but a Christian King."

² He lays the blame of his misconduct upon others, when impeached for failure.

When the vile tonguester getteth himself a name
By wooing mobs, who heretofore was naught. 425

THESEUS.

An eloquent herald this, a speech-crammed babbler !
But, since thou hast plunged into this strife, hear
me :—

'Twas thou flung'st down this challenge unto parley :—
No worse foe than the despot hath a state,
Under whom, first, can be no common laws, 430
But one rules, keeping in his private hands
The law : so is equality no more.

But when the laws are written, then the weak
And wealthy have alike but equal right.
Yea, even the weaker may fling back the scoff 435
Against the prosperous, if he be reviled ;

And, armed with right, the less o'ercomes the great.
Thus Freedom speaks¹ :—" What man desires to bring
Good counsel for his country to the people ? "

Who chooseth this, is famous : who will not, 440
Keeps silence. Can equality further go ?

More—when the people piloteth the land,
She joyeth in young champions native-born.
But in a king's eyes this is hatefullest ;
Yea, the land's best, whose wisdom he discerns, 445
He slayeth, fearing lest they shake his throne.

How can a state be stablished then in strength,
When, even as sweeps the scythe o'er springtide mead,
One lops the brave young hearts like flower-blooms ?
What boots it to win wealth and store for sons, 450

¹ He quotes the formula with which the herald opened the proceedings of the popular assembly at Athens.

When all one's toil but swells a despot's hoard ?
 Or to rear maiden daughters virtuously
 To be a king's sweet morsels at his will,
 And tears to them that dressed this dish for him ?
 May I die ere I see my daughters ravished ! 455
 Such is the answering shaft that I hurl back.
 But thou, what wouldst thou have of this our land ?
 Except thy state had sent thee, thou shouldst rue
 Thine insolent prating ! 'Tis the herald's part
 To speak his message, and to get him back 460
 With speed. Henceforth let Kreon to my town
 Send a less wordy messenger than thee.

CHORUS.

Out on it ! When God prospereth evil men,
 Wanton they wax, as who should prosper aye.

HERALD.

Now will I speak my charge. For our dispute, 465
 Be this thy mind, contrariwise be mine.
 But I and all the folk Kadmean warn thee—
 Receive Adrastus not into this land.
 If in the land he is, ere set of sun
 Free from yon wreaths your sacred Mysteries,¹ 470
 And drive him forth, nor go about by force
 To take those dead : ye have nought to do with Argos.
 If thou obey me, thou by storm unscathed
 Shalt helm thy city ; if not, our great surge
 Of war on thee and thine allies shall fall. 475
 Look to it, nor, being chafed at these my words,—
 Because forsooth a city free thou hast,—

¹ Of which this temple of Demeter at Eleusis was the seat.

Make arrogant answer from a weaker cause.
Hope is men's curse : full many a state hath this
Embroided, by kindling it to mad emprise. 480
For, when for war a nation casteth votes,
Then of his own death no man taketh count,
But passeth on to his neighbour this mischance.
But, were death full in view when votes were cast,
Never war-frenzied Greece would rush on ruin. 485
Yet, of elections twain, we know—all know—
Whether is best, the blessing or the curse,
And how much better is peace for men than war,
Peace, which is to the Muses chiefest friend,
But mourning's foe, which joyeth in fair children, 490
In wealth delighteth. Fools let all these slip,
And rush on war : man bringeth weaker man
To bondage ; city is made city's thrall.
Thou helpest men our foes, and dead men they, [495
Wouldst win for graves them whom their insolence slew!
Good sooth, then, wrongfully did levin blast
Kapaneus' frame upon yon ladder's height,
Which he had reared against our gates, and swore
To sack the town, whether God willed or no :— [500
Wrongly earth's chasm snatched from sight the seer,
Shrouding with yawning gulf his four-horse car ;
And other captains lie before our gates,
The knittings of their bones with crags to-shattered ! . . .
Or boast thee now in wisdom more than Zeus,
Or say that rightly Gods destroy the wicked. 505
Behoves the wise to love his children first,
Parents and country next,—to make her great,
Not break her down. Rash leaders, pilots heady,
Mean ruin : the wise in season sitteth still.
This too is manful valour, even discretion. 510

CHORUS.

The punishment of Zeus might well suffice !
 Shall *he* insult with wanton arrogance ?

ADRASTUS.

Villain of villains !—

THESEUS.

Hold, Adrastus, peace,
 And thrust not in before my words thine own ;
 For not to thee yon fellow doth his message, 515
 But unto me : 'tis I must make reply.
 Now, thy first utterance will I answer first :—
 I know no Kreon despot over me,
 Nor more of might than I, that he should force
 Athens to do this. Sourceward back should flow 520
 Life's stream, if we shall brook such hest as his !
 It is not I that launch upon this war,
 Seeing with these I sought not Kadmus' land.
 But lifeless bodies—harming not your state,
 Nor thrusting man-destroying strife on her,— 525
 I claim to bury : lo, all Hellas' law
 Do I uphold. How is not this well done ?
 For if of Argives ye have suffered aught,
 They are dead : with glory ye hurled back your foes,
 With shame to them :—but there your right hath
 end. 530
 Let now the dead be hidden in the earth,
 And each part, whence it came forth to the light,
 Thither return,¹ the breath unto the air,
 To earth the body ; for we hold it not

¹ Reading ἀπελθεῖν *vice* ἀπῆλθε.

In fee, but only to pass life therein ; 535
 Then she which fostered it must take it back.
 Dost think thou woundest Argos through her dead ?
 Not so : the common cause of Greece is this,
 If one shall rob the dead of rightful dues,
 And hold them from the tomb : this shall unman 540
 Even heroes, if such law shall be ordained.
 And to me comest thou to bluster threats,
 While ye fear corpses, if they be entombed ?
 What fear ye ? Lest they undermine your land,
 There buried ?—or in earth's dark womb beget 545
 Children, of whom shall vengeance fall on you ?
 'Twere idle waste of speech, good sooth, to unmask
 Your caitiff terrors and your empty fears !
 O fools, learn ye the real ills of men :—
 Our life is conflict all : of mortals some 550
 Succeed ere long, some late, and straightway some ;
 While Fortune sits a queen : worship and honour
 The unblest gives her, so to see good days ;
 The blest extols her, lest her wafting breath
 Should fail him. Therefore should we think on this :
 Wronged, temperately bear it, not with wrath ; [555
 Neither on one whole nation visit wrong.
 How shall it be then ?—grant to us, who will,
 To entomb the dead and render heaven its due.
 Else, clear is the issue : this will I by force. 560
 For never unto Greeks shall it be told
 That the Gods' ancient law was set at nought
 In mine and in Pandion's city's charge.

CHORUS.

Fear not : for while thou wardest justice' light,
 Thou shalt not fear what men can say of thee. 565

HERALD.

Wouldst thou I summed up this thy claim in brief?

THESEUS.

Speak, an thou list: no tongue-tied wight art thou.

HERALD.

Thou ne'er shalt win from our land Argos' sons.

THESEUS.

Now, if thou wilt, give ear to me in turn.

HERALD.

Yea—since I cannot choose but hear in turn. 570

THESEUS.

From thy land will I take and bury them.

HERALD.

First must thou face the hazard of the shield.

THESEUS.

Full many a harder emprise have I dared.

HERALD.

A champion born to match him with all men!

THESEUS.

With all proud scorers: not the right I scourge. 575

HERALD.

Ay, thou wilt still be meddling—thou and Athens.

THESEUS.

Much glorious toil is hers, and much good speed.

HERALD.

Come !—let the dragon-seed but find thee there !

THESEUS.

What valorous host should spring from dragons' teeth ?

HERALD. [580

This shalt thou learn, and rue. Thou art yet but young.

THESEUS.

Tush, man, thou canst not move mine heart to wrath
With all thy vauntings. Get thee forth the land :
The idle words thou broughtest, bear them back ;
For nought can come of this. [*Exit Herald.*

Behoves set forth

Each man-at-arms, each rider of the car. 585

Now let the charger's cheek-piece, dashing foam
About his jaws, hurl into Kadmus' land.

For on to Kadmus' seven gates will I march,

Bearing myself the whetted steel in hand,

Myself mine herald. Thee I bid remain, 590

Adrastus : mingle not with mine thy fate.

For I 'neath mine own fortune's star will lead

Mine host, a chief renowned with glorious spear.

One only thing I need, all Gods to have [595

Which reverence right : for where these are, they give

Victory. Naked valour nought avails

To men, except it have the Gods' good will. [*Exit.*

HALF-CHORUS 1.

(Str. 1)

Ye hapless mothers of hapless chieftains dead,
Ah, how is mine heart storm-tossed with pale
dismay—

HALF-CHORUS 2.

What ominous word and strange of thee was said ? 600

HALF-CHORUS 1.

For what shall befall Queen Pallas' war-array !

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Through battle, or peace-fraught parley, wouldst
thou say ?

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Ay, this last should be well ; but if warrior-quelling
Slaughters and battles again shall be seen,
With the beating of breasts in each desolate dwelling
Of the land, what reproaches bitter-keen
Should I win, through whom this sorrow hath
been !

HALF-CHORUS 1.

(Ant. 1)

Yet doom may the victor bring down low in dust ;
This comforteth me, and bids be dauntless-souled.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Thou speakest of Gods that fail not, ever just. 610

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Of whom but of such be all our fates controlled ?

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Ah, many a change in God's ways I behold !

HALF-CHORUS 1.

By the terrors o'erpast is the heart in thee stricken :
Yet justice aloud unto justice doth call ;
Blood calleth for blood, and the Gods shall requicken
Our souls, for to mortals all blessings befall
From the hands that encompass the goal of all.

HALF-CHORUS 1.

(*Str.* 2)

O might I speed from the Goddess's springs,
Even Kallichorus, to the fair-towered plain !

HALF-CHORUS 2.

O would the Gods but vouchsafe to me wings, 620
So to win to the city of rivers twain !¹

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Ah then shouldst thou clearly discern—
How thy champions speed shouldst thou learn.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Ah God, what fate, what doom doth await
The king of the mighty hand,
The hero of Kekrops' land ?

HALF-CHORUS 1.

(*Ant.* 2)

We have cried to the Gods, and we cry once more
To the first best trust of the sore afraid.

¹ Thebes : round the base of the hill on which stood the old fortress, flowed, on one side, the Ismenus, on the other, the Dirké.

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Zeus, hear us, whose offspring was born of yore
Of Inachus' daughter, the heifer-maid !

HALF-CHORUS 1.

Oh be our champion thou,
To our city be gracious now ! 630

HALF-CHORUS 2.

Thy belovèd are we, it was planted of thee,
This city whose sons we would gain
For the tomb from the outrage-stain.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

Women, I come with tidings full of joy,—
Myself escaped, for I was ta'en in fight, 635
What time those seven bands of chieftains slain
Hard by the fount of Dirke strove their strife,—
Tidings of Theseus' triumph. I will spare thee
Question :—a vassal I of Kapaneus
Whom Zeus did blast with blazing levin-bolt. 640

CHORUS.

Dear friend, glad tidings this of thy return,
Glad news of Theseus : but if Athens' host
Is safe withal, thou heraldest all joy.

MESSENGER.

Safe : and hath fared—I would Adrastus so
Had fared with Argos' sons whom forth he led 645
From Inachus to that Kadmean burg.

CHORUS.

How then did Aigeus' son uprear to Zeus
 The trophy, he and those his spear-allies?
 Tell; thou wast there: them that were not make glad.

MESSENGER.

Bright the sun's beam, true-levelled shaft of light, 650
 Smote on the earth. Beside Electra's gate
 On a far-looking tower I stood to watch.
 And three tribes I beheld of war-bands three:
 A mail-clad host far-stretching up the slopes
 Unto the height Ismenian, as men said; 655
 And the king's self, even Aigeus' glorious son,
 And those about him, marshalled on the right;
 In Kekrops' ancient land abiders they:
 To left, the Seaboard Men, arrayed with spears
 By Arês' fountain, and the clouds of horse 660
 Drawn out upon the fringes of the host,
 Equal by tale: the battle-cars stood ranged
 On levels 'neath Amphion's hallowed tomb.
 Before their ramparts marshalled, Kadmus' folk
 Behind them had those corpses, cause of strife. 665
 There against horsemen panoplied horsemen stood,
 And chariots facing four-yoked chariots set.
 Then Theseus' herald cried in all men's ears:
 "Silence, ye people! Hush ye, ranks of Kadmus!
 Hearken—we come but for the corpses' sake, 670
 To bury them, and keep all Hellas' law
 Inviolatè; nor would lengthen bloodshed out."
 But Kreon let his herald answer not,
 But silent under shield abode. Thereat

¹ See Appendix B.

The four-horsed chariot-lords began the fray. 675
On, down the battle-lanes of foes they swept,
Set down their warriors, spear opposing spear,
And, while these strove with bickering steel, those
wheeled

Their steeds about, to aid their fighting-men.
Then Phorbas, captain of the Erechtheid horse, 680
And they withal which led the Theban riders,
Marking the tumult of the battle-cars,
Down charging clashed, now triumphing, rolled back
now.

This saw I, and not heard ; for I was there, [685
There where the chariots and the warriors grappled.
Of thousand horrors there, which first to tell
I know not—or of dust that surged and soared
Upward unto the heavens, clouds on clouds,—
Of men, by tangling reins snatched from the cars, [690
Slung earthward,—of the murder-streams of gore,—
Men falling here, and there, as crashed the chariots,
With violence hurled head downwards to the earth,
And battered out of life by chariot-shards.
But Kreon, marking how our horse prevailed
On one wing, grasped his buckler in his hand, 695
And vanward pressed, ere allies' hearts should faint.
Ha, but the heart of Theseus fainted not !
On charged he, tossing high his flaming shield.
There clashed they in the midmost of the fray :
Men slew—were slain—a thunder of battle-cries 700
Rang, roared, of men on-cheering each his fellow—
“ Smite ! ”—“ Drive the spear against Erechtheus’
sons ! ”

But the host wrought to man of dragon-teeth
Was a grim wrestler : back it bowed our wing

Far on the left ; but, by our right o'erborne, 705
 Fled theirs : so equal-balanced was the fight.
 Then did our captain well and worshipfully ;
 His triumph on the right sufficed him not,
 But he to his hard-pressed half-array sped fast,
 And sent a shattering shout,—earth rang again,— 710
 “ My sons, except ye stay the stubborn spear
 Of the Dragon-seed, your Pallas' cause is lost ! ”
 So thrilled with courage all the Danaid host.
 Himself that Epidaurian weapon seized,
 The fearful mace, and slingwise swung it round, 715
 Down-mowing and clean-logging with his club
 Alike their necks and heads in helmets cased :
 And scarce even then those stubborn feet would fly.
 And I, for joy I shouted, yea, I danced,
 And clapped mine hands. On strained they to the
 gates. 720
 Then rang a cry and wailing through the town
 Of young and old : the panic-stricken thronged
 The fanes. But, though the way within lay clear,
 There Theseus stayed :—“ Not to destroy the town
 Came I,” spake he, “ but to reclaim the dead.” 725
 Well might men choose such battle-chief as this,¹
 Who is in peril's midst a tower of strength,
 But hates the scorners who, in fortune's hour
 Seeking to mount the ladder's topmost round,
 Let slip the bliss that lay within their hands. 730

CHORUS.

Now I, beholding this unhopèd-for day,

¹ Cf. “ O, was there ever such a knight, in friendship or in war,” Macaulay, *Ivry*.

Know that Gods live, and feel my load of ill
Lighter, since these have paid the penalty.

ADRASTUS.

Zeus, wherefore do they say that wretched man
Is wise? For lo, we hang upon thy skirts, 735
And that we do, it is but as thou wilt.
We deemed before our Argos none might stand,
Ourselves, a countless host of lusty arms;
And, when Eteokles proffered terms of peace,
Fair was his offer, yet we would not hear; 740
So were undone. Now, prospering in their turn,
Like beggar-wight with sudden-gotten wealth,
Wanton they waxed, and perished in their pride
Kadmus' mad-hearted sons. O foolish men,
Who, straining with the bow beyond the mark, 745
And suffering many ills at justice' hand,
To friends at last yield not, but circumstance!
Ye states, which might by parley end your feuds,
By bloodshed, not by words, decide your wrongs.
Yet wherefore this?—Fain would I know of thee 750
How thou didst 'scape; then will I ask the rest.

MESSENGER.

When tumult's battle-earthquake shook the town,
Through that gate slipt I where the host poured in.

ADRASTUS.

And the dead bring ye, cause of all the strife?

MESSENGER. [755

Even all which captained those seven bands renowned.

ADRASTUS.

Ha !—and the rest which perished, where be they ?

MESSENGER.

Laid in the tomb, hard by Kithairon's folds.

ADRASTUS.

On that side, or on this ?¹—who buried them ?

MESSENGER.

Theseus, where hangs Eleutheræ's shadowing rock.

ADRASTUS.

Where leftest thou those whom he buried not ? 760

MESSENGER.

At hand : for earnest haste brings all things near.

ADRASTUS.

I wot, with loathing thralls took up the slain.

MESSENGER.

Never a slave set hand unto the toil.

ADRASTUS.

[How ?—did the *king* endure this, of his love ?]²

¹ *i.e.* On the Theban or the Attic side of the range: the tombs would be in the possession of the people in whose land they were. Eleutheræ was in Attica.

² Inserted conjecturally, to complete the defective *stichomuthia*.

MESSENGER.

Hadst thou but seen his ministry of love !

ADRASTUS. [765

He washed, himself, the poor youths' slaughter-stains !

MESSENGER.

And spread the biers, and veiled the bodies o'er.

ADRASTUS.

An awful burden was it, fraught with shame !

MESSENGER.

Nay, but what shame to men are brethren's ills ?

ADRASTUS.

Ah me, far liever had I died with them !

MESSENGER.

Bootless thy mourning, stirring these to tears. 770

ADRASTUS.

I trow themselves this mourning-lore have taught.

But now I raise mine hand to greet the dead,

And pour out songs of death with streaming eyes,

Hailing our loved, bereft of whom—ah me !—

Forlorn I weep : for the one loss is this¹ 775

¹ Might have been suggested by the words of Achilles :—
“For kine may ye get you in foray, and flocks of goodly sheep ;
There be tripods to win, and the bright-maned war-steed's
gallant head :

But neither by foray nor price returneth the life to the dead,
When once through the fence of the teeth the soul of a
man hath fled.” *Iliad* ix, 406-9.

That never mortal maketh good again,—
The life of man, though wealth may be re-won.

CHORUS.

(Str. 1)

There is joy, there is sorrow this day ; for our town
Hath a garland of glory ;
And the chiefs of the spear-host, lo, twofold renown 780
Maketh splendid their story.

But to see my sons' limbs !—sight bitter for me,
Yet proud, for the day that I hoped not to see
Hath uprisen before me

Who have seen earth's ghastliest misery.

(Ant. 1)

Ah that Time the father, the ancient of days,
Had but caused me unmarried

To abide ! Was I wholly in evil case
While childless I tarried ?

Nay, no dark bodings of anguish broke 790

My peace, when I thought to refuse love's yoke :

But of dear sons harried

Now see I mine home, no visioned stroke.

Ah, yonder I see the forms draw nigh

Of our perished children ; alas !

O but with these my belovèd to die,

Unto union in Hades to pass !

*Enter Theseus, with Athenian soldiers marching in
procession with corpses on biers.*

ADRASTUS.

(Str. 2)

Mothers, ring out the moan

For dear dead 'neath the ground ;

Echo my crying with accordant groan
Of mournful-wailing sound.

800

CHORUS.

O my son !—bitter word
For mothers' lips to know !
I cry on thee, in ears that have not heard :
Ah for my woe !

ADRASTUS.

We suffered—

CHORUS.

Deepest anguish !

ADRASTUS.

Ah, fair town
Of Argos, see my fate !

CHORUS.

O yea, upon our sorrows she looks down,
The childless desolate !

810

ADRASTUS.

(Ant. 2)

Bring them, the blood-besprent
Forms of the evil-starred,
When to unrighteous foes the victory went,
Slain, an unmeet reward !

CHORUS.

Give them, that I may cast
Mine arms round these, and lull,
In death's sleep clasped, my children.

ADRASTUS.

This thou hast.

CHORUS.

Grief's cup is full !

ADRASTUS.

Woe !

CHORUS.

Blend thy wails with ours !

ADRASTUS.

Hear me !

CHORUS.

For us, for thee, is sped. Thy moan
820

ADRASTUS.

Oh had the foe slain me !

CHORUS.

Oh had I known
Never a husband's bed !

ADRASTUS.

Ah mother !—ah, dead child ! (Str. 3)
Lo, what a trouble-sea !

CHORUS.

Our cheeks are furrow-scarred, and our white heads are
marred

With ashes all defiled.

ADRASTUS.

Woe's me, ah woe is me!

(*Ant.* 3)

Yawn for my grave, earth's floor!

Storm-blast, in pieces break! 830

O that on mine head dashed the flame of Zeus down
flashed!

CHORUS.

Ruin thy bridals bore:

Thy ruin Phœbus spake.

(*Epode.*)

The curse of Oedipus, with sighing fraught,
Childless hath left his house, and thee hath sought.¹

THESEUS (*to leader of Chorus*).

Thee had I asked, but, for thy mourning poured
Forth to the host, refrain, and my request
To thee forego, and ask Adrastus now:—² 840
Of what race sprang these chiefs, above all men
Which shone in valour? To my young Athenians
Tell, of thy fuller wisdom; for thou know'st.
Their gallant deeds, too great for words to speak,
Thou saw'st, whereby they hoped to win yon Thebes.
One question, meet for laughter, I ask not— [845
Whom each of these encountered in the strife,
Or from what foeman's spear received his wound.

¹ Reading *ἐρημά σ'* for *ἐγῆμας*.

² Lines 838-40 are, by general consent, corrupt, and have been variously emendated. The translation given is an approximation to the sense of the text as it stands in the MSS.

For they that hear such tales as much could say¹
 As he which tells. Who, that hath stood in fight, 850
 When spear on spear is flying before men's eyes,
 Can certainly report who bravely bears him?
 I could not ask such vanity as this,
 Nor them believe whose impudence would tell.
 For scarce a man can see what see he must, 855
 What time he standeth foot to foot with foes.

ADRASTUS.

Hear then. To no unwilling lips thou givest
 The praise of these: full fain am I to speak
 Both truth and justice touching men I loved.
 Seest thou yon corpse wherethrough leapt Zeus's bolt?
 Kapaneus he, a mighty man of wealth, [860
 Yet nought thereby exalted, but he bare
 A spirit no whit loftier than the poor,
 Shunning the man whose pomp of banquets scorned
 That which sufficeth. "Not in gluttony," 865
 Said he, "is good: enough is as a feast."
 True friend to friends was he, alike when near
 And far: of such is there no multitude.
 A guileless heart, a mouth of gracious speech,
 Who left no dues unrendered, or to servants 870

¹ I have retained the MSS. reading of *κοινοὶ* and *ἀκουόντων*. Literally—"Such tales are as much the property of the listener as of the narrator," *i.e.*, one has as much right to tell them as the other. The sarcasm, that the latter in point of fact knows no more than the former, is materially weakened by the emendations (*κενὸν* and *ἐρωτώντων*) of Grotius and Nauck, adopted by Paley, which give the sense—

"For empty words are these of whoso asks
 And whoso tells."

Or citizens. Now of the next I speak,
 Eteoklus, graced, he too, with excellence.
 A young man he, not rich in this world's goods,
 But in the Argive land dowered rich with honour;
 Who oft, when friends would lavish on him gold, 875
 Received it not his doors within, to make
 His life a slave stooped 'neath the yoke of wealth.
 He loathed wrong-doers, not his erring country;
 Seeing the guilt is nowise in the state
 That through an evil pilot wins ill fame. 880
 Such too Hippomedon was, the third with these.
 From childhood up he deigned not turn aside
 Unto the Muses' joys for ease of life;
 But in the field abode, enduring hardness
 Gladly for valour's sake, and, hunting still, 885
 Joyed in the steed and hands that strain the bow,
 Eager to yield his land his body's best.
 The fourth was huntress Atalanta's son,
 Parthenopæus, unmatched in goodlihead:
 Arcadian he, but came to Inachus, 890
 And lived his youth at Argos. Fostered there,
 First, as beseems the sojourner in the land,
 He vexed not, nor was jealous of the state,¹
 Nor was a wrangler, whereby citizens
 Or aliens most shall jar with fellow-men; 895
 But in the ranks² stood like an Argive born,
 Fought for the land, and, whenso prospered Argos,

i.e. Of the caste-distinctions of Greek society, which made an alien permanently inferior to citizens born, and excluded him from politics.

² Or, "But even in ambush"—a service of special danger, evincing peculiar devotion to the cause, like the "forlorn hope" of modern warfare (cf. *Iliad* i, 227, xiii, 277).

Rejoiced, and grieved when it went ill with her ;—
 Beloved of many a man, of maids how many !
 Yet from transgression did he keep him pure. 900
 Tydeus' high praise next will I sum in brief.
 In speech he shone not ; a dread reasoner he
 In logic of the shield, and war's inventions :
 In counsel not as his brother Meleager,
 Yet of like fame, through science of the spear 905
 Getting him ripest scholarship of war.
 A soaring soul was his, a spirit rich¹
 Where deeds might serve ; in speech of less avail.
 Hearing my words, O Theseus, marvel not
 That these before yon towers feared not to die : 910
 For noble nurture harvest bears of honour ;
 And whosoe'er hath practised knightly deeds
 Shames to be callèd base. It may be taught,
 This chivalry ; for even the babe is taught
 To speak and hear things not yet understood ; 915
 And what one learneth, that he is wont to keep
 To hoary hairs. So train ye well the child.

CHORUS.

O son, for thy sorrow I gave thee
 Life of my life 'neath my zone,
 And I bore for thee travail-pain : 920
 And now is my loss death's gain ;
 Of my labours no fruit doth remain,
 Nor to foster mine eld may I have thee.
 Woe's me that I bare a son !

¹ Retaining MSS. reading *ἥθος, πλούσιον φρόνημα*, etc.
 Paley's emendation conveys a reflection on rich men, which
 would by implication be a disparagement of Kapaneus (861).

THESEUS.

Yea ; and for Oikleus' noble son withal,— 925
Him the Gods living snatched down earth's abyss,
Him and his car ;—his praise is manifest.¹
But Oedipus' son—I tell of Polyneikes—
Myself shall praise, nor falsely speak herein.
My guest was he, ere, leaving Kadmus' town 930
Self-banished, unto Argos he crossed o'er.
But knowest thou my wish as touching these ?

ADRASTUS.

Nought know I, save one thing—to heed thy words.

THESEUS.

Kapaneus, stricken by the fire of Zeus—

ADRASTUS.

Wouldst bury him apart, a hallowed corpse ? 935

THESEUS.

Yea, but the rest all on one funeral-pyre.

ADRASTUS.

Where wilt thou set for him that several tomb ?

THESEUS.

Here, by these halls I have built his sepulchre.

¹ And he therefore needs none from me. Amphiaraus was "the righteous taken away from the evil to come," being thus rescued from the pursuit of the enemy, and entombed by the Gods themselves.

ADRASTUS.

He then shall have the tendance of thy thralls.

THESEUS.

These, mine. Now let the biers of death move on. 940

ADRASTUS.

Come, hapless mothers, to your sons draw nigh.

THESEUS.

Adrastus, this thou say'st were all unmeet.

ADRASTUS.

How should the mothers choose but touch their sons?

THESEUS.

'Twere death to look on them so sorely marred.

ADRASTUS.

A ghastly sight is death, even in death's hour.¹ 945

THESEUS.

Why then wouldst add fresh anguish to their grief?

ADRASTUS.

Sooth said. Ye, tarry patiently, for well
Speaks Theseus. When to fire we have given these,
Yourselves the bones shall gather. Hapless mortals!
Why do ye get you spears and deal out death 950
To fellow-men?—Stay, from such toils forbear,

¹ "Before decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers."

And peaceful mid the peaceful ward your towns.
 Short is life's span : behoves to pass through this
 Softly as may be, not with travail worn.

*The funeral procession passes on to the pyres, which are
 kindled in sight of the stage.*

CHORUS.

(*Str.* 1)

Crowned with fair sons above others
 No more am I seen,
 Neither blessèd mid Argive mothers ;
 Nor the Travail-queen
 To the childless shall give fair greeting !
 Forlorn is my life, as the fleeting 960
 Clouds that flee fast from the beating
 Of the storm-scourges keen.

(*Ant.* 1)

Seven mothers—and heroes seven
 To our sorrow we bare :
 None princelier to Argos were given.
 Now in childless despair
 Drear old age creepeth upon me ;
 Yet the ranks of the dead have not known me,
 Nor the count of the living may own me ;
 But an outcast I fare. 970

(*Epode*)

For me are but tears remaining :
 Saddest memorials rest
 In mine halls of my son—shorn hair
 For mourning, and garlands are there ;
 Libations—for dead lips' draining ;¹

¹ "In ordinary circumstances, libations and songs were signs of festivity ; here they are so qualified as to signify the reverse." (Paley).

Songs—which the golden-tressed
 Apollo shall turn from in scorn ;
 And with wails shall I greet each morn,
 Ever drenching with tears fast raining
 The vesture-folds on my breast.

Lo, yonder the fiery bower, 980
 Even Kapaneus' sacred pyre :
 I see it without the fane,
 With Theseus' gifts to the slain.
 Lo, Evadnê his bride, in this hour
 By the slain of the levin-fire !
 King Iphis' daughter renowned,
 On yon cliff why is she found
 Whose crags above this fane tower ?
 And she climbs, and she climbs ever higher !

*Evadnê appears on the cliff above the pyre of Kapaneus,
 dressed in festal attire.*

EVADNE.

Where now that light that shone 990
 When flashed thy wheels, O Sun,
 Or when the moon raced on,
 And star-lamps glancing
 Raced through a lowering sky,
 When Argos tossed on high
 The gladsome bridal-cry,
 And throbbed with dancing,
 And thrilled with song, to see
 Mine hero wed with me ?—
 O love, I rush to thee 1000
 From mine home, raving,
 Seeking thy tomb, thy pyre,

Longing with strong desire
 To end in that same fire
 Mine anguish, braving
 Hades—to end life's woe ;
 For death is sweetest so
 With dear dead to lie low :—
 God grant my craving !

CHORUS.

Lo, the pyre nigh,—above it dost thou stand,—
 Zeus' own possession, on the which is laid 1010
 Thy lord, o'erthrown by flash of levin-bolt.

EVADNE.

The end !—I see it now,
 Here standing. Friend art thou,
 Fortune ! From this cliff's brow,
 For wifhood's glory,
 With spurning feet I dart
 Down into yon fire's heart
 To meet him, ne'er to part,—
 Flames reddening o'er me,— 1020
 To nestle to his side,
 In Cora's¹ bowers a bride !—
 O love, though thou hast died,
 I'll not forsake thee.
 Farewell life, bridal bed !—
 By happier omens led,²

¹ Persephonê, queen of Hades.

² Lines 1026—30 are imperfect in the MSS. The most probable sense, (reading *φανέειν τέκνοισιν ἐμοῖς· εἴη δ'*—etc.), is that her orphan daughters may find loving husbands and a wedded lot more fortunate than hers.

Ah, be our children wed !

May leal love make ye,
Bridegrooms to be, life through
Unto my daughters true :
One love-breath breathe in you.

Now, Death, come—take me ! 1030

CHORUS.

Lo, here himself, thy sire, is drawing nigh,
Old Iphis, within sound of thy strange speech,
Which, heard not yet, shall wring his heart to hear.

Enter Iphis.

IPHIS.

O hapless thou !—O hapless ancient I !—
Burdened with twofold grief for kin I came 1035
To bear unto his fatherland o'ersea
My son Eteoklus, slain by Theban spear,
And seeking for my daughter, who hath fled
Forth of mine halls, the wife of Kapaneus, [1040
Longing with him to die. Through days o'erpast
Guarded she was at home : but soon as I
Slackened the watch, for ills that pressed on me,
Forth did she pass. Howbeit here, methinks,
Is she most like to be. Say, have ye seen her ?

EVADNE.

Wherefore ask these ? Here am I on the rock. 1045
Even as a bird, my father, hang I poised
In misery o'er the pyre of Kapaneus.

IPHIS.

My child, what wind hath blown, what journeying
led thee ?
Why flee thine home and come unto this land ?

EVADNE.

Thou wouldst be wroth to hear my purposes. 1050
O father, I would not that thou shouldst hear.

IPHIS.

How?—were't not just thy very father knew?

EVADNE.

Thou wouldst be no wise judge of my resolve.

IPHIS.

And why in this attire array thy form?

EVADNE.

Father, strange meaning this my vesture hath. 1055

IPHIS.

Thou seemest not as one that mourns her lord.

EVADNE.

For deed unheard-of have I decked me thus.

IPHIS.

By tomb and pyre appear'st thou in such guise?

EVADNE.

Yea, I for victory's triumph hither come.

IPHIS.

What victory this? Fain would I learn of thee. 1060

EVADNE.

Over all wives on whom the sun looks down.

IPHIS.

Or in Athênê's toils,¹ or prudent wit?

EVADNE.

In courage. With my lord will I lie dead.

IPHIS.

How sayest thou?—what sorry riddle this?

EVADNE.

I plunge to yon pyre of dead Kapaneus. 1065

IPHIS.

O daughter, speak not so before a throng!

EVADNE.

Even this would I, that all the Argives hear.

IPHIS.

Nay, surely will I let thee from this deed.

EVADNE.

Let or let not—thou canst not reach nor seize me.

Lo, hurled my body falls, to thee no joy, 1070

But to me and my lord with me consumed.

Throws herself from the cliff on to the pyre.

CHORUS.

O lady, what awful deed hath been compassed of thee!

¹ "The daughters of that land still surpass all other, to whom

Athênê hath given rare skill in the beautiful works of the loom." *Odyssey* vii, 104-5.

IPHIS.

O Argos' daughters, wretched I!—undone!

CHORUS.

Woe for thee, woe, who hast borne this misery!
Yet its fulness of horror remaineth for thee to see. 1075

IPHIS.

None other shall ye find more sorrow-crushed.

CHORUS.

O ancient, O sore-stricken heart,
In the fortune partaker thou art
Of Oedipus: thou and mine hapless city therein have
part.

IPHIS.

Ah me, why is not this to men vouchsafed, 1080
Twice to see youth, and twice withal old age?
Now in our homes, if aught shall fall out ill,
By wisdom's second thoughts this we amend.
Our life we may not. Might we but be young
And old twice o'er, if any man should err, 1085
We would amend us in that second life.
For I, beholding others rich in sons,
For children yearned, and by my longing perished.
Had I to this come first,—by suffering proved
What to a father child-bereavement means, 1090
I had never come to this, to this day's woe,
I, who begat a young son of my loins
Most goodly, and am now of him bereft!
No more!—what must I do, the sorrow-fraught?
Wend home?—and see with desolation filled 1095

Home—for my life the hunger of despair?
 Or seek the mansion of yon Kapaneus?—
 Erst sweet, O sweet, when this my daughter lived!
 Ah, but she is no more, who wont to draw
 Down to her lips my face, fold in her arms 1100
 Mine head:—nought sweeter than a daughter is
 To grey-haired sire: sons' hearts be greater-framed,
 But not, not theirs the dear caressing wiles!
 Lead me, with speed O lead me to mine home,
 And hide in darkness, there to make an end 1105
 Of this old frame, by fasting pined away.
 What profit if I touch my daughter's bones?
 Strong wrestler Eld, O how I loathe thy grasp,
 Loathe them which seek to lengthen out life's span,
 By meats and drinks and magic philtre-spells 1110
 To turn life's channel, that they may not die,
 Who, when they are but cumberers of the ground,
 Should hence, and die, and make way for the young.

The stage gradually fills with a procession, in which the Sons of the dead chiefs bear the urns containing their ashes. The members of the Chorus advance to meet them.

CHORUS.

Woe is me, woe!
 Onward, onward the bones of sons, sons dead,
 Are borne: O lend me your hands; my strength is
 sped,
 Handmaids: stricken with eld, in childless pain
 I faint for my dear sons slain.
 Bowed down under the load of years on years,
 Wasted ever with sorrows, aye with tears,

Couldst thou tell of a harder, sorer stroke 1120
 That lighteth on mortal folk,
 Than when mothers behold their dead sons' biers?

CHORUS OF CHILDREN.

(Str. 1)

I bear, O I bear,
 Sad mother, the limbs of my sire from the burning,—
 A burden not light, for the weight of my sorrow is
 there,—
 All that I love in this little vial inurning.

CHORUS OF MOTHERS.

Woe is me, woe!
 Is it all that thou bringest, the salt tears' flow,
 To the dead men's mother?—nought else canst thou
 show?
 To a handful of dust brought down are the forms of the
 men of renown 1130
 So glorious erewhile in Mycenæ-town?

FIRST CHILD.

(Ant. 1)

Alas for my doom!
 Sad son of an ill-starred father forsaken,
 Henceforth I inherit the orphan's desolate home,
 Unsheltered by arms of the sire from whose loins I
 was taken.

FIRST MOTHER.

Woe for my plight!
 Whitherward hath my toil for my babes taken
 flight?
 What thank have I now for the vigils of night?

What thank for the mother's breast, for the eyes that
 would take no rest,
 And the dear face oft to my own face pressed ?

SECOND CHILD.

(*Str.* 2)

They are gone !—no sons hast thou any more—they
 are gone, [1140
 O mother : for these by this hath the wide air won.

SECOND MOTHER.

They crumbled to ashes mid flame as they lay,
 And to Hades now have they winged their way.

THIRD CHILD.

O my father, the wail of thy sons ringeth down unto
 thee.
 Ah shall I ever bear shield, an avenger to be
 Of thy blood ?

THIRD MOTHER.

God grant it, my child, to thy destiny !

FOURTH CHILD.

(*Ant.* 2)

My father's avenging !—one day unto me shall it come,
 If God will :—the wrong sleepeth not by his side in the
 tomb.

FOURTH MOTHER.

Ah, to-day's disaster and sorrow suffice :
 Sufficeth the grief on mine heart that lies ! 1150

FIFTH CHILD.

Ha, yet shall they greet me, Asopus' ripples of light,
 Leading the Danaans onward in brass-mail dight ?

FIFTH MOTHER.

A champion thou of thy perished father's right.

SIXTH CHILD.

O father mine, methinks I see thee now !

(*Str.* 3)

SIXTH MOTHER.

Laying the kiss of love upon thy brow.

SIXTH CHILD.

But thy words of exhorting are come to nought ;
They are wafted afar on the wind's wing caught.

SIXTH MOTHER.

Unto twain is anguish bequeathed, unto me,
And grief for thy father shall ne'er leave thee.

SEVENTH CHILD.

By this my burden am I all undone !

(*Ant.* 3)

1160

SEVENTH MOTHER.

Let me embrace the ashes of my son !

SEVENTH CHILD.

I weep to hearken thy piteous word,
Most piteous—the depths of mine heart hath it stirred.

SEVENTH MOTHER.

O son, thou art gone : never more shall I gaze
On the light of thy mother, thy glorious face !

THESEUS.

Adrastus, and ye dames of Argive race, 1165
 Ye see these children bearing in their hands
 The dust of gallant sires whom I redeemed :
 Even these do I and Athens give to thee.
 And ye must guard the memory of this grace,
 Keeping my boon for aye before your eyes. 1170
 And on these boys I lay the selfsame charge,
 To honour Athens, and from son to son
 To pass on like a watchword this our boon.
 And Zeus is witness, and the Gods in heaven,
 How honoured and how favoured hence ye pass. 1175

ADRASTUS.

Theseus, our hearts know all thy noble deeds
 To Argos, and thy kindness in her need.
 Our love shall ne'er wax old : ye have dealt with us
 Nobly : your debtors owe you like for like.

THESEUS.

What service yet remains that I may render ? 1180

ADRASTUS.

Fare well : for thou art worthy—thou and Athens.

THESEUS.

So be it. The same fortune light on thee.

Athênê appears in her chariot above the temple-roof.

ATHENE.

Give ear, O Theseus, to Athênê's hest
 What thou must do—for Athens' service do :—

Yield thou not up thus lightly yonder bones 1185
 For these their sons to bear to Argive land ;
 But, for thine and thy city's travail's sake,
 First take an oath. Let yon Adrastus swear—
 He answereth for them, despot of their folk,
 For all troth of the land of Danaus' sons :— 1190
 Be this the oath,—that never Argive men
 Shall bear against this land array of war ;
 If others come, their spear shall bar the way.
 If ye break oath, and come against our town,
 Call down on Argos miserable ruin. 1195
 And where to slay the victims hear me tell :
 Thou hast a brazen tripod in thine halls,
 Which Herakles, from Ilium's overthrow
 Hasting upon another mighty task,
 Bade thee to set up at the Pythian hearth. 1200
 O'er this three throats of three sheep sever thou,
 And in the tripod's hollow grave the oath.
 Then give it to the Delphian God to guard,
 Token of oaths and witness unto Hellas.
 And that keen knife, wherewith thou shalt have gashed
 The victims with the death-wound, bury thou [1205
 In the earth's depths hard by the seven pyres.
 For, if they march on Athens ever, this,
 Shown them, shall daunt, and turn them back with
 shame.
 This done, then send the dead dust forth the land. 1210
 The precinct where fire purified their limbs
 Be the God's Close, by those three Isthmian ways.
 This to thee : now to the Argives' sons I speak.
 Ye shall, to man grown, waste Ismenus' town
 In vengeance for the slaughter of dead sires. 1215
 Thou in thy sire's stead, Aigialeus,¹ shalt be

¹ Son of Adrastus.

Their young chief : from Aetolia Tydeus' son,
Named Diomedes of his sire, shall come.
When beards your cheeks are shadowing, tarry not
To hurl a brazen-harnessed Danaïd host 1220
On the Kadmean seven-gated hold.
Bitter to them as lions' whelps full-grown
To strength, to sack their city shall ye come.
This is sure doom. "The After-born" through Hellas
Named, shall ye kindle song in days to be ; 1225
Such war-array with God's help shall go forth.

THESEUS.

Athênê, Queen, thy words will I obey :
Thou guid'st me ever that I may not err.
Him will I bind with oaths : only do thou
Still lead me aright ; for, gracious while thou art 1230
To Athens, shall we ever safely dwell.

CHORUS.

On pass^{us} we, Adrastus, and take oath-plight
Unto Theseus and Athens. That worship requite
Their travail for us, is meet and right.

[*Exeunt Omnes.*]

APPENDIX A.

On the Character of Admetus.

WHILE the play of *Alcestis* is, of all the remains of the ancient classical drama, the most popular with modern readers, it is, beyond question, the most misunderstood. We bring to our estimate of it judgments based on instincts inherited from our Teutonic forefathers, ideas which took form in the days of medieval chivalry, and convictions begotten in us of the teachings of Christianity. Hence, when we read of a husband who availed himself of a heaven-given opportunity of escaping death at the price of his wife's life, all our sympathies go out to the love, the unselfishness, the courage, of the willing sacrifice, and in the husband's conduct we find the meanest selfishness and the most unmanly cowardice. The invectives of Pheres appear as a well-merited castigation, unanswerable in their withering force. The sorrow of Admetus seems hypocritical, and his lamentations hollow. Browning (*Balaustion's Adventure*) describes him as doing in the death-scene everything but the one right thing, which would have been to insist on revoking the compact. It is not enough to answer that Euripides had to make the best of a legend which he could not alter; we have to account for the fact that the legend, both in its original form and in Euripides' treatment of it, was regarded as redounding to Admetus' glory rather than to his shame. For it is certain that the modern view is diametrically opposed to that of the Athenian audience. In their eyes—1. Admetus was a noble character: 2. He was in the right in respect to the *motif* and incidents of the play: 3. He reaped the just reward of the good man.

1. Admetus was a noble character, for he displayed the highest-social virtue recognised by a Greek—hospitality, the crowning height of unselfishness, as truly a part of patriotism in peace, as heroism was in war. The hospitable man embodied for them the virtues, not only of the modern philanthropist, but also those of the enlightened diplomatist: he established and maintained friendly relations with other states, gaining for his city allies, and for her people friends and protectors in foreign lands, and that in days

when, without such, not only was travel perilous, but even commerce was difficult and precarious. The deserts of the man who thus served his country, and his countrymen individually, without regarding the cost to his own fortune and convenience, could not be overrated. Conjugal affection shrank into insignificance beside such a trait. Admetus is the supreme type of this class, a point which is emphasized by the fact that Apollo set the seal of Heaven's approval upon his peculiar excellence, by accepting, and so consecrating, his hospitality. It was his duty to his country (quite apart from his position as her king and protector), to neglect no means of prolonging his usefulness.

2. He was in the right in respect to the *motif* and incidents of the play:—A God put forth special exertions, taxed to the utmost his divine craft in outwitting the Fates, in order to gain a conditional privilege for his earthly friend. That the man should thereupon decline to accept the boon, would have seemed to the Greeks, not false delicacy merely, but impiety; just as it would have seemed to a Hebrew impious for Abraham to renounce the favour of God when it involved the sacrifice of his son. The acceptance of the condition was perhaps the easier, because the time of its fulfilment was indefinite, as we gather from ll. 524 and 526, where Herakles, while referring to Alcestis' pledge as a matter well known to him, yet has no idea that the time for its redemption has come. The compact once made, we may fairly infer that it was impossible to draw back from it: a mortal could not play fast and loose with the powers beneath, and "the Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts." Hence, though Admetus passionately cries to Alcestis to take him with her, he does not, he cannot, propose the impossible, to die instead of her. Again, it was part of the fitness of things that the less valuable life should be surrendered for the more valuable. To the Greeks of that time, the proper victim should have been the king's old father or mother. Phereas' conduct in valuing his own life before that of his son was in their eyes unnatural, unreasonable, and unpatriotic. He owed a paternal duty to his son: he had already enjoyed his share of life's pleasures; his life was no longer worth living, for the utter contempt for old age prevalent in Athens in those days, must have made its infirmities an unmitigated misfortune:¹ and his life was now useless to the community. Hence his arguments in reply to Admetus' reproaches would appear as a tissue of selfishness and shameless-

1. This view of old age is again and again expressed in the plainest language both by the Dramatic and Gnomie poets.

ness. His exclamation (l. 726) that he cares not what men may say of him after his death—a sentiment simply atrocious to a Greek¹—is enough in itself to indicate that he is meant to be in the wrong throughout the altercation, in which he could have been in the right only on the supposition that he had as good a claim to live as his son, which is precisely what to the Greek was inconceivable. Failing the substitute who shirked his duty, Alcestis would be regarded as simply fulfilling hers in yielding her life. For here again, besides the obvious claims of wifely devotion, was the incontestable fact that the less precious life was given for the more precious. It was an axiom with the Greeks, which Euripides has in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* (1394) put into words, that "the life of one man was better than that of ten thousand women." That Alcestis did but rise to the height of her duty is in no way inconsistent with the praises lavished upon her. A soldier who throws himself in front of his king to receive in his own body the stroke of an assassin or a foe is indeed extolled, but would he not be counted false to his duty, did he, at the supreme moment, shrink behind his king? The especial pathos of the situation to the audience lay in this, that the sacrifice of a young and happy woman was forced upon her by the cowardly selfishness, not of her husband, but of a miserable old man: that Admetus should not have found a substitute at all would have seemed monstrous.

3. Admetus reaped the just reward of the good man:—All the respectable characters of the play have nothing but sympathy for him. The Chorus—the embodiment of enlightened public opinion—praise him and condemn his parents: they put up prayers on his behalf: they offer for his consolation considerations which presuppose the paramount value of the life so redeemed, and express a nascent hope (ll. 603-5) that there may yet be blessing in store for him. Herakles, the incarnation of manliness and high courage, is full of sympathy and admiration for him, and is kindled to enthusiasm by his unselfish hospitality; and it is of cardinal importance to the right understanding of the situation that the turning-point of the plot is to be found in a crowning instance of Admetus' pre-eminent virtue, which is made the justification for the extreme measure by which the *dénouement* is effected, as though he alone of men were worthy to have the decrees of fate reversed in his favour. To adapt the words of a modern poet, his actions said, "Write me as one that loves his fellow-men" . . . "and lo,

1. The current view is expressed by Odysseus in the *Hecuba* (ll. 315-319).

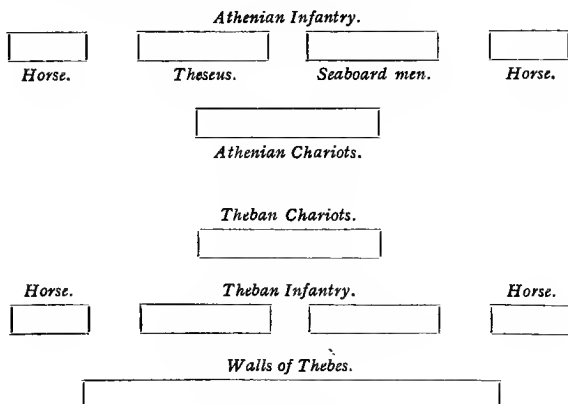
Admetus' name led all the rest." We might go so far as to say that for the Greek audience the real theme of the play was not so much "The devotion of Alcestis," as "The reward of virtue," just as for a Hebrew the subject of the crowning episode of his first father's history was not "The self-devotion of Isaac," but "The faith and obedience of Abraham."

The foregoing remarks are, of course, not designed to change the modern reader's estimate of Admetus' action, but to show that he was not intended to be lowered in the eyes of the audience, and that whatever censure we pronounce must include also a condemnation of some fundamental principles of Greek ethics.

APPENDIX B.

Note on *Suppliants*, l. 653.

The following plan will make the disposition of the troops clear:—



END OF VOL. I.

